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# **Co-operative Academies: a transindividual possibility in individualistic times?**

Joanna Dennis  
PhD 2018

# Co-operative Academies: a transindividual possibility in individualistic times?

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fulfilment of the requirements of  
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## Abstract

This thesis examines the development of the Co-operative schools project in England, a school transformation initiative of the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College, UK. Since 2008, the Co-operative schools project has developed a number of Co-operative school models, which are positioned as a ‘values-based alternative’ to the controversial Academies programme. The growth of the Co-operative schools project suggests that there is indeed an appetite for ‘alternative’ and ‘values-based’ education. However, it is not clear what the Co-operative alternative *is* or *how* the values and principles of the Co-operative movement translate to achieve educational transformation in schools.

Integral to the design of this project was my role as ‘embedded researcher’ at the Co-operative College, enabling a unique perspective on the expanding initiative. Through an immersive and exploratory practice of research and reflection, across multiple sites, this study tracks the way in which the initiative evolved as both a feature of, and a resistance to, processes of marketisation and privatisation in education. The research critically examines the rhetoric and strategy of the UK Co-operative movement as it expands into a rapidly changing schools sector.

This thesis turns to the political philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) for a theory of co-operation. The key contribution of this research is in the identification of Spinoza’s philosophy as an appropriate theoretical lens for interpreting and developing the ontological foundations of co-operative education. The research employs the concept of *transindividuality*, which emphasises the *co-operative power* of the collective individual. The research demonstrates the way in which Spinoza’s collective individual offers an alternative ontological positioning to the competitive and utility maximizing individual of the neoliberal subject. This alternative foundation offers a productive lens through which to reconfigure co-operative education, with wider implications for the reimagination of schools and their communities.

The research demonstrates that the Co-operative schools project lacks an adequate theoretical foundation and has engaged in a non-strategic approach of resistance and hope, factors which serve to limit the co-operative power of its schools. The argument concludes that for educational transformation the Co-operative schools project must move beyond the handed-down values of the consumer Co-operative movement, and consider the *transindividual* power of a fully embodied and locally constituted co-operative pedagogy. This would involve an expansive and dynamic understanding of the school as a vital and integral part of its wider community.

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## Abbreviations used in the thesis

BSF	Building Schools for the Future
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CTC	City Technology College
CVA	Contextual value-added
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAZ	Education Action Zones
FSM	Free school meals
GCSE	General Certificate of Education
GM	Grant-maintained school
ICA	International Co-operative Alliance
KS3	Key Stage 3 (Years 7, 8 and 9)
KS4	Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11)
KS5	Key Stage 5 (Year 12 and 13)
NQT	Newly qualified teacher
NUSAWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
SCS	Schools Co-operative Society
SLT	Senior Leadership Team

## Referencing

MMU Harvard 4<sup>TH</sup> Edition is applied throughout with the exception of reference to Spinoza's *Ethics*, where the following conventional abbreviated citation is used:

EI for *Ethics*, Part I (Roman numerals refer to parts of the *Ethics*); A for axiom; C for corollary; D for demonstration (or definition if followed by an Arabic numeral); L for lemma; Post. for postulate; P for proposition; S for scholium (Arabic numeral denote the lemma, proposition or scholium number); and Ap for appendix.

Thus, the citation EIP8S2 refers to *Ethics*, Part I, Proposition 8, Scholium 2.

Citations for the *Ethics* refer to: Spinoza, B. (1996). *Ethics* Edwin, M. Curley (trans.) London: Penguin, 1996.

All emphasis is original unless otherwise stated.

Throughout this thesis, wherever the term 'Co-operative' and 'Co-operation' are associated explicitly with the principles and values of the Co-operative movement, the terms are capitalised. Where, in contrast, 'co-operation' and 'co-operative' are simply understood as verbs or adverbs, with no explicit associations with the Co-operative movement, no capitalisation is employed.

## **A note on anonymity**

This thesis reports on research into an initiative, which was pioneered by the Co-operative Group, the Co-operative College and the Schools Co-operative Society. In reporting this study I identify these organisations but I protect the anonymity of those individuals who participated in the research by giving them pseudonyms. In the course of the research I also visited several schools, which I refer to using pseudonymous names and locations. All research participants are given pseudonyms.

## Chapter 1. Introducing the research

### The Co-operative schools project: an explosion of hope or ‘privatisation by nice guys’?

The idea for this research project sprang from a sense of optimism and possibility around the growth of Co-operative schools in England. These schools, which were developed by the UK Co-operative movement, offer an approach based on the Co-operative values of: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity (Co-operative College, 2010). They are positioned as an *ethical alternative* within the expanding schools market and have proved popular with teachers and parents. The first Co-operative school opened in 2008 and, in less than three years, numbers increased to 150 (Thorpe, 2011). In spring 2013, there were ‘just over 400’ (Co-operative College, 2013) and by the autumn, when I took up my PhD post, there were ‘over 600’ (Thorpe, 2013). The Co-operative schools project continued to expand during the early stages of my research, with reported numbers peaking at over 800 schools in 2014 (Mills, 2015).

The ‘rapid growth’ (Thorpe, 2013:6) of Co-operative schools has generated a sense of excitement and hope amongst Co-operators, educationalists and academics (Woodin, 2015c). Some describe ‘[a] mounting conviction ... that a new approach to education is possible’ (Woodin and Fielding, 2013:180) and others, invoking the revolutionary words of Victor Hugo, argue that Co-operative education is ‘an idea whose time has come’ (Facer et al., 2011:1). As this ‘co-operative experiment’ (Woodin, 2012:327) gathered pace, during a period of intense education reform, it came to be regarded as a ‘movement’<sup>1</sup> (Thorpe, 2011:61) of resistance and hope (Facer et al., 2012). In 2012, the Co-operative schools project earned the support of several teacher unions, including the NUSAWT, which suggested that Co-operative schools might provide the ‘means to maintaining public service ethos and values in education’ (Roach, 2013:269). However, other education campaigners are sceptical and predict different outcomes for the longer-term, expressing concern that the Co-operative school project is merely ‘privatisation by nice guys’ (Birch, 2012).

This research is important because it examines the Co-operative schools project as it expands into the English schools sector. As education is transformed, through the mechanisms of privatisation and marketisation, it is vital that new providers are researched, that new models

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<sup>1</sup> The Co-operative College began to refer to its Co-operative schools project as ‘a movement’ in early 2010. The term ‘co-operative schools movement’ first appears in academic literature in 2012 (Facer et al., 2012) and is in regular use by 2015 (Coates, 2015; Davidge et al., 2015; Woodin, 2015c). Throughout this thesis, I use the term ‘Co-operative schools project’ in order to achieve consistency when referring to the lifespan of Co-operative movement’s involvement with the schools sector, which began in 2003.

are scrutinised, and that ideas about what education is and how it is organised are investigated (Ball and Junemann, 2012). The Co-operative schools project is under active construction and, therefore, this highly contemporary research is necessarily exploratory, raising many more questions than it has been possible to answer. From the outset, what I found fascinating about the ‘flourishing movement of co-operative schools’ (Woodin and Fielding, 2013:179) was the apparent (or possible) coming together of education, politics and philosophy – and with these, the prominence of ethics. It was with these influences that I designed the project and began the research.

## **1.1 The transformation of the English schools sector: marketisation and the Academies programme**

Over a period of 30 years, there has been a radical shift in the government and administration of England’s schools. With emphasis on the marketplace mechanisms of ‘choice’ and ‘autonomy’, successive legislation has reduced the role of the local authority, to advance a mixed economy of schools. In this growing marketplace, state agencies join with business and philanthropy to compete in a centrally funded and highly regulated ‘self-improving system’ (DFE, 2010). These processes of marketisation are the accomplishment of neoliberal politics that have dominated education policy in England since the 1980s (Ball, 2007, 2012a; Exley and Ball, 2014).

Central to this reforming process, and to the emergence of the Co-operative schools project as an alternative, is the controversial Academies programme (Ball, 2008a; Gunter, 2011). Academies are ‘independent state schools’ (DFE, 2010:51), which are funded by central government and independent of local authority control. The Academies programme was originally launched in 2000, as a focused initiative to target a small number of failing secondary schools in urban areas (West and Bailey, 2013). In 2008, the programme was expanded as part of New Labour’s National Challenge (Harris, 2009; Riddell, 2009) and by the end of that administration there were 203 open academies. In 2010, the new Coalition government entered parliament with radical plans to extend academisation across the sector, announcing the ambition that ‘academy status should be the norm for all state schools’ (DFE, 2010:52). The ensuing legislation (Academies Act, 2010) has provoked a ‘new education landscape’ (Gilbert et al., 2013) by extending the powers of central government in education. This significant political push, coupled with a new school inspection framework (Courtney, 2013), means that many schools have found themselves vulnerable to ‘forced academisation’ (Ball, 2016). The outcome is a radically transformed education sector in which

schools have been encouraged to compete for limited resources and simultaneously incentivised and coerced to adopt academy status.

This expansion of private enterprise in education has prompted significant criticism from groups of parents, teachers and academics. There is a concern that this transformation serves to erode long-established educational values, and that the wider purposes of education are threatened as individual academic ‘performance’ becomes closely linked to the micro-economy of the individual school. As schools become uncoupled from local government, and thus from the processes of local democracy, there are concerns about the future of the public sector (Simkins et al., 2015) and the erosion of democratic accountability (Hatcher, 2012). As the system becomes more fragmented, and schools strive to succeed in a competitive environment, there is an increased potential for unfairness and inequality (Lupton, 2011; Lupton and Thomson, 2015). This transformation of the schools sector has happened both quickly and slowly. An incremental process of marketisation has occurred over 30 years, evolving through a rhetoric of ‘choice’, ‘specialism’ and ‘autonomy’. However, the recent expansion of the Academies programme has dramatically accelerated the scale and pace of change. There are currently 6899 open academies, representing 64% of all secondary schools and 26% of all primary schools (DFE, 2017). This is an increase of 3299% since 2010.

## **1.2 The Co-operative schools project**

Emerging from within this reform process and in response to changing threats and opportunities, the UK Co-operative movement has extended into the sector with a range of Co-operative schools. There are currently three models in operation: Co-operative ‘trust’ schools, Co-operative ‘sponsored’ academies and Co-operative ‘converter’ academies. Together these schools promise a Co-operative approach, which has been framed as an ‘alternative’ and ‘resistance’ to neoliberal education (Thorpe, 2011; Facer et al., 2012; Woodin, 2012; Woodin and Fielding, 2013; Woodin, 2015c; Mills, 2015).

In 2015, the Co-operative College claimed a network of 800 schools, which was ‘connecting a whole new generation with the Co-operative values and principles’ (Co-operative College, 2015b). This growth of influence occurred during a sustained programme of marketising reform to the English education system (Chitty, 2014), which created several opportunities for the Co-operative movement to expand into the education sector and undertake its work with schools. Over a short period, Co-operative education moved from the peripheral

interest of a small number of committed advocates to a significant feature of the state education system.

Whilst the rapid growth of this project has taken many by surprise (Woodin, 2015a), occurring as a response to specific legislative reform and presenting itself as an alternative (Woods, 2015), it is not accurate to present it as an organic manifestation without external cause. The involvement of the UK Co-operative movement in the development of the Co-operative schools project in England has been significant, with The Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College, UK each playing a defining role (Woodin, 2015c:114).

The Co-operative Group is the largest member-owned business in the UK, with 4.64m active members (Coop, 2017). Its current business portfolio includes food retail, funeral services, insurance and legal services, banking services and travel agency. In 2010, The Co-operative Group ‘committed to invest £1m to support the expansion of Co-operative Schools’ (The Co-operative Group, 2010:56). As part of its Co-operative social mission it has a focus on education and young people and is involved with a wide range of initiatives which significantly impact the ‘Co-operative education sector’ (Facer et al., 2012:327).

The Co-operative College, UK was founded in 1919 as ‘the educational arm of the Co-operative movement’ (Facer et al., 2012:328). It is a small charity, with dedicated expertise in Co-operative education, training and development. Until recently it was financially supported by The Co-operative Group, however recent structural changes mean that it is now an incorporated body with its own Co-operative membership (Co-operative College, 2015a). In addition to its wider work, which includes a significant portfolio of international projects (Shaw, 2011), the Co-operative College has played a key role in the recent development of the Co-operative schools project in England.

The drivers for this Co-operative experiment are multiple and they have also changed significantly over time. The first Co-operative schools grew out of the Specialist Schools programme, a government initiative designed to draw expertise from the private sector (DFES, 2005b). The Co-operative Group were persuaded to act as a sponsor for 10 Co-operative Business and Enterprise Colleges and it commissioned the Co-operative College to develop Co-operative curriculum resources and to facilitate the growth of a network (Wilson and Mills, 2007). This successful project led to the development of bigger ideas and, when legislation allowed in 2006, the Co-operative movement began to develop the Co-operative ‘trust’ school, in which the Co-operative values were translated from a specialist curriculum

area into a full governance model. The first Co-operative ‘trust’ school opened in 2008 and the model received a resounding endorsement from the New Labour government (DCSF, 2009), which positioned the model as one option for underperforming National Challenge schools facing closure (Harris, 2009; Riddell, 2009).

Later, with a change of government and the dramatic expansion of the Academies programme (DFE, 2010), many schools turned to the Co-operative trust model for a values-based alternative which allowed them to ‘remain within the Local Authority family’ (SCS and NASUWT, 2011). Other schools, some of them existing Co-operative ‘trusts’, urged for a Co-operative ‘converter’ academy, a model that was quietly developed and approved in 2011. As the wider education landscape shifted and positive stories of Co-operative possibility began to appear in the media (Mansell, 2011; Birch, 2012) more schools were inspired by the potential of the Co-operative schools project. In 2009, The Schools Co-operative Society (SCS) was established as an ‘apex’ Co-operative (a Co-operative of Co-operatives) ‘to provide services and a voice for the sector’ (Thorpe, 2013:8) and all Co-operative schools were encouraged to become members. During this period of rapid growth the Co-operative College, which was project managing the school conversions, extended a welcome to all comers - some schools grasped a sense of possibility in the Co-operative approach and others saw it as a way to protect themselves from the creeping ravages of the unpopular academisation programme (Facer et al., 2012; Woodin, 2012).

Perhaps it is straightforward to explain the appeal of the Co-operative school models amongst parents and education professionals. Co-operation is a ‘people’s movement’ (Birchall, 1994) and, much like a school or a family, Co-operation consists in relationships between people. However, there is also a political agenda. Deep in the rhetoric of ‘people’s movement’, and in the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Co-operative movement, is the ideal of social transformation – a goal which is also shared by many in education (Desjardins, 2015). Political reform to the school system, over a period of 30 years, has orchestrated the steady migration of power from local to central government and from the public to the private purse (Chitty, 2014; Ball, 2017). Glatter (2013) warns of the ‘democratic deficit’ which is created by the transfer of schools from public to private ownership and the Co-operative schools project appears to offer an alternative to this. There is a promise, perceived and



articulated, that local stakeholders (students, parents, communities and teachers) might have power and ownership in *their* Co-operative schools.

As the Co-operative schools project gathered pace, particularly from 2010, it created a sense of hope and possibility by offering itself as a form of ‘resistance’ and ‘alternative’ to bleaker visions of a fully-privatised school system. Arriving at the Co-operative College in 2014, I felt these notions of resistance and alternative very powerfully. They were often directly articulated and they were always implied. They were in the minds of those who first discussed my PhD project, they were in the sentiment of the school leaders with whom I made my first connections, and they were tentatively there in early pieces of academic writing about Co-operative schools (Facer et al., 2012; Woodin, 2012). That which was being resisted was the neoliberal reform of schools, specifically the radical expansion of the Academies programme. Despite contradictions, including many that were unknown to me at the time, the Co-operative schools project was presented as an alternative and resistance to academisation and, initially, this appealed to me.

However, as time went on, I felt less sure that ‘resistance’ and ‘alternative’ were useful strategies for the kind of Co-operative transformation that was promised by the Co-operative College. One manager at the Co-operative Group said, ‘I know that the education system shouldn’t be broken up and delivered by multiple providers but, if it is to be so, then I want to ensure that these business models are operating ethically’. This view was also reflected by others; as the landscape changed, teachers and parents trusted ‘the Co-op’ and looked towards the Co-operative schools project as an ‘ethical choice’. At the Co-operative College, the growth in numbers was being interpreted as ‘a movement’ and ‘a quiet revolution’ (Shaw, 2012; Thorpe, 2013; Wilson, 2015), and the preference for an ‘ethical choice’ was celebrated as a statement of ‘resistance’ to academisation. I was troubled by this assumption, it seemed possible that the emergence of Co-operative schools revealed a concern for ‘ethos’ and ‘public character’ in schools but ‘resistance’ and its companion ‘revolution’ were not wholly compatible with what appeared to be happening.

There is a significant hope that what is on offer in the Co-operative models represents a resistance to neoliberal education reforms and that, hand in hand with this notion of resistance, there is a revolutionary or alternative vision to change the way that schooling works ‘from within’ (LERG, 1980). There is much excitement. The wider situation seems so fragmented and the future looks so bleak, that many have united behind this glimmer of hope. However, what about those that are not supportive, for instance the Anti-Academies

Alliance? Does their stance reveal the tensions that exist in the involvement of the Co-operative movement in the English schools system? Do they resist the resistance because it is no resistance at all? They would argue that the Co-operative schools project arrives on the neoliberal horizon with just another school model. They would suggest that the involvement of the Co-operative movement is contributing to the weaknesses of the local authority, to the shrinking of the state and to the increasing democratic deficit.

The idea of resistance unravels further when we acknowledge the existence of the Co-operative 'converter' academy, which was developed with the new legislation in 2010. The model was approved by the DFE and by 2014, there were around fifty Co-operative 'converter' academies in the primary and secondary sectors. Given the 'anti-academies' stance of the earlier period, this model was awkward for the Co-operative College and it was defended by recourse to arguments of supply and demand. The CEO explained that the model was developed in response to demand from within the schools sector but that 'it is not promoted' by the College. This is a complicated position to hold, given that the College did undertake to develop the model, and did project manage all of the 'converter' academy conversions. It is also the case that several of these academies were positioned as flagship examples of 'Co-operative schools' and that the majority of elected board members at the Schools Co-operative Society were senior leaders of Co-operative 'converter' academies. The existence of Co-operative 'converter' academy appeared to be both controversial and contradictory for the Co-operative College.

Despite my stated interest in the political aspects of this work, as the research unfolded I found the politics quite difficult to negotiate – it was murky and complicated. The contemporary nature of my topic means that my research was, necessarily, 'an exercise in contemporary history' (Ball, 1990:1), and there were challenges in this approach. The growth of the Co-operative schools project occurred as the schools sector was involved in, still ongoing, processes of radical reform and innovation. As I began, there was a sense in which the education system was in chaos - old ways, values, ideas and priorities were being tested and debunked, and new realities were developing – this is the 'creative destruction' of neoliberal reform (Harvey, 2007b). As the role of the state in education changes and the established system of local authority involvement is replaced by centrally managed funding contracts and increased 'outsourcing', new characters enter the frame and joining or jostling with more established players (Hatcher, 2006; Ball, 2009; Gunter, 2011). It appears that certain positions are developing, or becoming entrenched - defender, protector, pioneer,

entrepreneur. There is, perhaps, a sense in which the Co-operative schools project has positioned itself both as defender/protector and simultaneously as pioneer/entrepreneur. However, this throws up no small degree of contradiction and tension for the Co-operative movement - how does it position itself as an 'an ethical alternative' as it becomes a major player in the new education economy? How is it offering an alternative? What is the alternative? Who is persuaded by it and why? What is it about the character of the Co-operative organisation of schools that allows it to straddle the public/private binary? Why is it tolerable for a Co-operative to act as a school provider when it is so unpalatable that a corporation might? How does a Co-operative differ from a corporation? In fact, does it? Don't all academies, from those in multi-academy 'chains' to 'standalone' Co-operative academies, register at Companies House and enter into a contractual funding agreement with the DfE? Is it not the case, then, that all Co-operative academies are constituted as corporations before the law? These questions raise an uncomfortable possibility for the Co-operative schools project - as it positions the heroic rhetoric of 'alternative' and 'resistance', it simultaneously relies on the marketisation of the schools sector.

Additionally, of course, it is not the case that everything is entirely new (or indeed entirely unwelcome). Simultaneously, as massive systemic changes occur, there is a sense in which everything is also staying the same - the daily business of the school goes on, education persists. It is important to have an awareness of both of these realities as they move together and apart. Policy is not merely implemented in schools but is 'enacted' by a diverse range of policy actors (Braun et al., 2010). When education reform is the profound restructuring of the whole system around the marketplace priorities of 'performance' and 'efficiency' then education providers, schools and teachers each respond in myriad ways. These might involve 'playing the system', 'teaching to the test', 'maintaining position', 'seeking advantage' - strategies which almost certainly lead to compromises of social justice (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). In the case of the Co-operative schools project, is there also something else at work? Why have so many education professionals and parents acquiesced to academisation only in its Co-operative form? Are they striving to walk on that boundary between private and public? Can Co-operative academies evolve as an ultra-local and ultra-democratic alternative to local government involvement in schools? How are the performance and efficiency priorities being interpreted and enacted in Co-operative academy schools?

The idea that the Co-operative schools project is 'defending' the state from the onslaught of neoliberal privatisation of schools and retaining a 'democratic' process in the education

system can also be seen as flawed in other ways. Some of the education professionals that I spoke to were able to identify benefits to being ‘free’ from the local authority, they were glad of the independence to manage their own affairs, and they welcomed the opportunity to connect with different partners within their communities. Perhaps the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy (as opposed to a ‘standard’ academy) offers a break from the ‘state’, via the neoliberal free-market, and a return of power to the stakeholders - a return of the public to the community school. It is a somewhat persuasive idea but it raises a significant number of questions and concerns - how far and to what extent is this possible, or even desirable? What mechanisms are in place to guard against co-optation and corruption? Is Co-operation merely a nostalgic hope in an otherwise bleak landscape?

### **1.3 Why Spinoza? Politics, philosophy and ethics**

As the research progressed, I began to see how notions of alternative and resistance were unhelpful to the newly emerging Co-operative schools. I knew that positive and progressive education had to be about more than defence – there had to be more to the Co-operative schools project than resistance to change, or of changing to stay the same. The Co-operative ‘converter’ academies seemed to offer some possibilities here – perhaps these schools, which had embraced academy status, would be better placed to articulate the alternative vision.

The Co-operative ‘converter’ academy model is presented as a ‘values-based’ model which offers a particular governance structure and ethos through which schools will be able to operate ‘alternatively’ or in ‘resistance’ to the standard academy models by becoming an ‘ethical’ school. My research set out to explore the promise of these schools - I wanted to investigate the vision, understand the motivations and explore the experience. In the early phase of my project I was drawn to the philosophy of Spinoza to help me think about co-operation - what it is and what it can do. Whilst there are many historical and contemporary examples of Co-operative organisation in practice, I could not find a theoretical account of co-operation. The Co-operative movement tends to explain itself with reference to the foundation story of the Rochdale Pioneers (Fairbairn, 1994) and to the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) Statement of Co-operative Identity (Appendix A), which is often referred to as ‘the values and principles’ or ‘the ethics and values’. Whilst these act as helpful

illustrations of ideal practice, I find them insufficient to providing an adequate account of what Co-operation *is* and *how* it works.

This thesis turns to the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) in order to think through the concept of (small c) co-operation. Spinoza's *Ethics* (1996/1677) offers us an ontology of co-operation by developing a vision of the co-operative life and giving an account of *co-operative power*. I use this theory to understand the potential of co-operation and to ensure that my thinking on this topic retains an affirming spirit of activism and courage, despite the problems that my research reveals. Thinking with Spinoza allows me to develop ideas around *how* a Co-operative school might develop an expansive form of co-operative pedagogy.

If the privatisation and marketisation of schools is the problem and Spinoza's co-operation is positioned as the answer, then the nature of the problem is articulated by Marx in his critique of capitalism. Jason Read claims that 'Spinoza is a response to a question Marx poses, but does not answer' (Read, 2014). This, perhaps, is not such an astonishing leap, despite the lack of historical antecedence. Indeed, I came to Spinoza via the Marxist tradition and my interpretation of Spinoza is heavily influenced by Balibar (1997, 1998), Deleuze (1978, 1988, 1990), Montag (1999) and Sharp (2007; 2012). The imposition of economic values in education can be identified as a catalyst for the development of the Co-operative schools project, which positions itself as an 'alternative' or in 'resistance' to those economic values of rational self-interest, individualism and competition - in order to explore these questions, I turn to Spinoza.

The Co-operative schools project is a project of transformation (Shaw, 2015). By positioning itself as ideologically opposed to the dominant logic of competition, and in proposing a Co-operative alternative, this project seeks to change current conditions within education. However, it is not immediately clear why Co-operation is a good idea or how the 'ethics and values' work to achieve the stated ambitions of the Co-operative schools project. I propose that Spinoza offers us resources with which to think through these questions. My research draws on a concept of *co-operative power* that I find in the *Ethics* and I argue that it provides an important theoretical framework with which to explore the transformative power of Co-operative schools.

Spinoza is writing in 17th century Amsterdam, during a period of significant economic change, social upheaval and political unrest (Isreal, 2001). In turning to Spinoza, we are engaging with a philosopher who thinks beyond the dominant beliefs of his time and seeks

to illuminate a different possibility for social and political order. Urging his readers to see that the universe is not as it seems, he argues that there is no transcendental God, that the universe has no teleological purpose and that human individuals are just part of a complex mesh of interrelated matter. These radical revelations have a liberating capacity in Spinoza's project. He wants his readers to understand themselves as social creatures who, capable of reason and subject to emotion, have an immense capacity to form relationships and alliances with others, and to create harmonious ways of life. By appealing to both reason and imagination, he offers a persuasive logical argument and a pragmatic analysis of everyday practice. He wants to inspire his readers to recognise their power and to create co-operative ways of living together (James, 2010).

Spinoza suggests that the universe is in a constant state of activity. I understand this constant process of becoming as one in which things are infinitely possible. The infinitely possible is an imaginative and creative space, which gives rise to 'utopian' projects such as, for instance, those of Co-operation and neoliberalism. These are projects of the imagination - concerned with thinking the world otherwise and with exploring the imaginative possibilities of becoming. For Spinoza, imagination is integral to the flourishing of human beings - only through this vital reworking and expression of the material reality can rationality, understanding and power be increased - expanding the collective individual is our political and ethical responsibility.

Spinoza offers a distinctive means for theorising the potential of Co-operative schools. In the *Ethics*, he presents a philosophical system that places a high value on co-operation, and he develops a novel concept of *co-operative power*, which is based upon relation and interaction between individuals. He observes that when individuals, with a shared interest, combine to seek common goods their power is increased, so that seeking what is good for oneself means seeking what is good for others. The idea of the individual is central to Spinoza's theory of co-operation and he proposes a dynamic, mutable individuality that, through networks of alliance and relation, gives rise to increased collective power. So it is that, through a 'relational ontology' (Balibar, 1998), the individual strives to preserve itself, unfolding and expanding to incorporate infinite variation and possibility, always in affective relations with other individuals. This is what Balibar (1997) comes to call *transindividuality* and what Williams (2007) calls an 'overlapping individuality', it is a reciprocal and relational individuation. For Spinoza, everything in nature is connected, there is no external cause and all parts of nature actively express the immanent power of being (Deleuze, 1990). In such a universe,

individualism and collectivity are not opposites; rather the flourishing of the individual is grounded in its connections to, and with, others. I explore how this philosophical possibility might allow for an affirmative, rather than compromising, negotiation of the tensions between the collectivism and individualism that are simultaneously expressed and denied in the co-operative ‘converter’ academy as it born of its two seemingly disparate parents: neoliberalism and Co-operation.

Spinoza is writing at a time of economic change, social upheaval and political unrest. In response to this seething context of power relations, he is concerned with the question of human freedom and the possibility of democracy (Balibar, 1998). Spinoza’s philosophical project is articulated with very clear political goals in mind - he sets out to explode hegemonic beliefs, to expose rotten ideology and to question the power of the authorities. His account of substance and power is a direct challenge to the religious and monarchical establishment of his time. He is urging his readers to understand that the dominant beliefs are mistaken, that the authority and power of the establishment is corrupt and that, if they do not waken to the truth, dire political consequences will follow. This position is compelling when we reflect on our own 21st century moment. In some sense Spinoza’s concerns feel entirely modern, and his 17th century solutions seem to be very far-sighted. Deleuze (1988) alludes to the timelessness of this philosophy when he writes, ‘Spinoza feels, experiences, that he is eternal’ (p.13).

## **1.4 Researcher stance**

This research into the Co-operative schools project becomes a study of school reform, which is actually about politics and ideology. It is a story of power. In order to develop my argument I draw upon a particular conception of *co-operative power*, and I will outline this in Chapter 4. However, before I make that theoretical leap, I want to explain how I came to understand ‘power’ as a way of seeing and interpreting the story that unfolds in these pages. My decision to undertake this project, and to approach it in the way that I have, is undoubtedly shaped by my experiences as a teacher in a south London community school from 2004-2012.

When I joined that school as a newly qualified teacher (NQT), it had a strong ethos of inclusion and operated with mission of student empowerment. Whilst it was not always easy to work in that way, the ethos had integrity and, within our school community, there was a positive sense of power and a commitment to social justice. As teachers, we were supported

to design engaging curricula for mixed-ability classrooms, we were encouraged to experiment with democratic approaches to teaching and learning and, above all, we were trusted to build strong relationships with our students and their families. Sadly, over the course of my career, that ethos and mission were undermined. It happened quite slowly at first, we were gradually asked to do more things that seemed to contradict the core purpose of inclusion and empowerment. We were expected to 'be seen to be' doing things, there were more 'gentle reminders', and a greater emphasis on 'performance'. Our work wasn't, any longer, about student inclusion and empowerment - it was about levels of progress, C/D borderlines and Ofsted inspections. In 2010, there was a change of government and, suddenly, there were many more external changes - changes to inspection frameworks, changes to exam boards, changes to syllabus, changes to curriculum - the list went on. With each change there followed a series of adjustments and realignments that I can only describe as incremental losses of power. It seemed that these losses were felt by everyone - not just by myself and my colleagues, but also by our students, and their parents. The day came when the English department was required to teach in 'sets', which would involve grouping students according to their 'ability'. 'Setting' was a red line for me – it contradicted everything I thought valuable about teaching and learning. It challenged my beliefs about the purpose of education, and I could no longer work as a teacher in those circumstances. I considered moving to another school but, as I looked around, there were few options - most schools seemed to be suffering in the same way and others, the new academies, seemed to be much worse off. So, I left teaching.

My experience as a teacher is important to this research because it was from this place of hopelessness that I glimpsed the positive potential of the Co-operative schools project. I see education as a pathway to social justice and I truly believe that schools can effect social change from the heart of the communities that they serve. The Co-operative schools project claims a social transformation agenda and I set out to explore those possibilities. I was interested in the potential that these schools seemed to offer for a values-based organisation of work in education – not, exclusively, of teaching and learning but also of wider school business such as admission, employment, and community participation. I wanted to know if and how the Co-operative values were offering possibilities for schools to work Co-



operatively and to operate successfully within the wider context of performance-led organisation of work in education.

In my career I have both observed and undertaken teaching which has exuded or denied 'values'. I have worked in school environments where ethos was paramount and where values were discussed, I have also been required to ignore those same values and to, seemingly, work against a previously agreed ethos because of 'changing priorities' and other 'external pressures'. These pressures have increased as the demands of a performance-led system encroach on ideals of a values-led system. When the outcomes are only measurable and efficiency becomes the driver, then what is ineffable and unknowable slips away. Such demands on the ethical work of schools is demoralising and creates a hollow vacuum in which both the work of the teacher and the education of the student is undermined and devalued – such schools become merely 'exam factories' (Hutchings, 2015), a significant concern in each of the schools that I visited for this research.

The education professionals who participated in this study offered accounts to echo my own experience of working in a rapidly changing system, where priorities were shifting. This was the context in which the Co-operative schools project flourished, with its promise to offer a 'countervailing alternative' to neoliberal models of education. Teachers and parents, dissatisfied with political reforms that appeared to be undermining long-held educational values, turned to the Co-operative schools project with a sense of hope.

## **Conclusion**

This study is a political one. I understand education to be a political process and therefore any rethinking, repositioning or reorganisation of education is, necessarily, political in nature. In the present moment, there are significant systemic changes underway and powerfully contested ideological positions in expression. It feels to many of those who have given voice to this project that the education sector is changing irrevocably. These changes are variously presented as challenges and opportunities - it is an uncertain time. It is too soon to say where we find ourselves, or what the future might be, but it is pertinent to examine the present moment and to illuminate the positions and perspectives of those who find themselves, by design or happenstance, involved in shaping the future school. This inquiry is concerned with the evolution of the highly contested academy school and, from within that, the

emergence of the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy, which simultaneously presents as a character in multiple guises - defender, protector, pioneer, entrepreneur.

The evolution of the Academies programme and its rapid expansion from 2010, consists of an overlapping of politics and economics in state education and public sector reform. I understand this as an expression of an increasingly dominant neoliberal ideology, which animates familiar binaries and counter ideological positions and which shows no signs of abatement. Indeed the very concepts that suggest the possibility of getting beyond the dominant ideology such as ‘resistance’, ‘alternative’, ‘competition’, ‘battle’, and so on, serve only to return us to the same. The binaries that occur in the struggle between neoliberalism and counter ideologies, such as: private/public, competition/co-operation, individual/collective, play a significant role in this story and do serve as an orientation towards what might be at stake. However, I suggest that they also work to constrain thinking and curtail possible responses.

What these binary oppositions occlude is the possibility of something other than these eventualities - they occlude the possibilities of imagination, desire and creativity - they occlude, therefore, the possibility of thinking otherwise and with it the possibility of difference. I suggest that some of the guises adopted by and bestowed upon the character of the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy might be better understood as disguises - that, in some sense, they mask and diminish the real potential of these schools. This thesis argues that the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy school creates the space to organise school business according to a powerful principle of *transindividuality* that could constitute a movement towards being otherwise. I suggest that their emergence is a manifestation of desire and imagination, with roots in social utopianism and an agenda of social transformation. Rather than reducing the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy to a compromised form of resistance to neoliberal modes of privatisation and individualism, the imagination and desire of those that glimpse its potential suggests another possibility - one in which public ownership, collective power and values-based organisation might work to create a unique type of *transindividual* school. It is important to acknowledge that this is not a story of overcoming so much as becoming - the desire and imagination for co-operative forms of pedagogy and school organisation is currently in expression, and credible forms are emerging, but it is far from realised, and there are many internal and external factors that serve to limit its possibility.

## Research objectives and research questions

The over-arching question of this research is: ‘What is a Co-operative school?’ By that I mean, what is distinctive about a Co-operative school and how does it achieve that distinction? Throughout the research, I have been interested in what facilitates and inhibits co-operation in these schools, and I have sought to understand how these factors relate.

In order to answer these over-arching concerns, this thesis responds to the following research questions:

**RQ1:** How does the Co-operative schools project position Co-operative schools as a mechanism for school transformation?

**RQ2:** How have stakeholders interpreted and engaged with the Co-operative schools project?

**RQ3:** How have national to local contextual factors influenced the development of the Co-operative schools project?

**RQ4:** How might Spinoza’s theory of transindividual *co-operative power* be mobilised to rethink the potential of Co-operative schools?

## Thesis organisation and chapter synopsis

### *Chapter 1: Introducing the research*

Outlines themes of the research. I tell the story of the emergence and growth of the Co-operative schools project and I consider its position as an alternative and form of resistance, within the wider context of marketisation. I explain my interest in the project, which is the coming together of education, politics and philosophy. I explain my ‘researcher stance’ and my rationale for thinking with Spinoza.

### *Chapter 2: The marketisation of state education and the evolution of the Academies programme*

Provides a contextual framework for the research by introducing the key education reforms and controversies that have motivated and facilitated the Co-operative schools project. I trace the effects of neoliberal policy since 1988 by exploring the evolution of a marketplace in education and the increased emphasis on competition and individualism. I discuss the emergence and expansion of the Academies programme, a transformation initiative that emphasises school autonomy, freedom and choice. This chapter positions the issues to which the Co-operative schools project seeks to respond and outlines the political mechanisms through which it has been enabled to do so.

### *Chapter 3: Co-operation, the Co-operative movement and Co-operative education*

Introduces the concept of co-operation as both a general philosophy (‘small c’) and as a global social movement (‘big C’). I describe how these forms of co-operation come together in the contested concept of ‘co-operative education’, which I review historically and across various contemporary contexts. I provide a critical review of the literature relating to the emerging Co-operative schools project, focusing on its complex positioning as an alternative and resistance within an expanding marketplace. This review reveals tensions and weaknesses in the Co-operative approach, which are not supported by any specific theory or philosophical tradition.

### *Chapter 4: Spinoza: towards a theory of co-operation?*

Introduces Spinoza’s theory of transindividuality and explores related concepts, which are developed in contemporary scholarship. I argue that Spinoza offers a unique conceptualisation of *co-operative power* and an ontology of co-operation as transindividual. I position this as a theory of co-operation with contemporary application in the case of the

Co-operative schools project. I draw upon the important concept of *conatus* to develop a framework for the interpretation and analysis of the Co-operative schools project.

*Chapter 5: Research Design and Methods*

Describes the how the project design evolved in relation to the research questions and details the methods that were used. I describe the project as an ‘ethnographic case study’, an approach which has allowed an important degree of flexibility to move between research sites. This approach entailed an extended period of ‘embedded research’ at the Co-operative College and shorter research visits to four Co-operative academy schools, two of which are presented as case studies in this thesis.

*Chapter 6: Out in the field: a case study of the Co-operative College*

In this chapter, I provide an insight into the strategy and priorities of the Co-operative College and its relationship with the Schools Co-operative Society (SCS). My analysis shows that a confused idea of the Co-operative schools project circulated at the Co-operative College and that this was compounded by a muddled strategy, and a complicated relationship with SCS. I suggest that these factors have led to a wider uncertainty about what a Co-operative school *is*, what it can *do*, and *how* it can do it.

*Chapter 7: Further out in the field: two case studies of Co-operative ‘converter’ academies*

Describes two case studies of Co-operative ‘converter’ academies. In each case I sought to understand how the schools were interpreting their Co-operative status, what their expectations and aspirations were and how it was enabling their work. I describe these schools as examples of ‘constrained’ schools. I show how this characterization is evident in the way that these schools have responded to performativity and accountability measures, which in some sense would always be powerful obstacles to achieving what they wanted.

*Chapter 8: Conclusion – the ethics and politics of the Co-operative schools project*

Returns to Spinoza as the means for thinking beyond the over-determination of the findings and preparing the ground for moving beyond. Theorising with Spinoza allows a move beyond the notion of the atomised individual ‘self-improving’ school system, which insists upon winners and losers, towards *transindividualism* where individual growth is dependent on the co-operation and mutuality of others. This chapter positions the idea of the *transindividual* school and explores its possibilities.

## Chapter 2. The marketisation of state education and the evolution of the Academies programme

*We want every school to be able to quickly and easily to become a self-governing independent state school – an opportunity not just open to a small number of schools, but to all who want it*  
(Prime Minister Tony Blair, 2005)

*It is our ambition that Academy Status should be the norm for all state schools, with all schools enjoying direct funding and full independence from central and local bureaucracy*  
(DFE, 2010:12)

This chapter provides a contextual framework by introducing the key education reforms and controversies that have motivated and facilitated the Co-operative schools project. The general focus is the introduction of privatisation and marketisation to the English schools sector, with particular attention given to the evolution of the academy school and the political vision of a ‘self-improving system’ (DFE, 2010). The Academies programme is understood as part of a global education reform movement (Ball, 2012a), which conceptualises school improvement through the logic of the marketplace and the power of competition (Exley and Ball, 2014).

A key purpose of this chapter is to describe the changing role of the state in public education and to outline the political agenda that shapes these reforms. I argue that a neoliberal agenda drives the reforming programme – dismantling the collective/public model of education provision established after the Second World War, and replacing it with an individual/private model, which serves limited interests and is moving further beyond the reach of democratic process. It is this controversial reforming programme, of marketisation and privatisation, which has both inspired and enabled the Co-operative movement to enter the education sector with a range of Co-operative school models.

### 2.1 The rise of the neoliberal agenda

As Ball (2012b) considers the contemporary education landscape in England, he suggests that we find ourselves at the ‘beginning of the end of state education’ (p.89). He argues that neoliberal reforms of the last 30 years have reduced the welfare state and he focuses upon the role of the state in education. He argues that a neoliberal programme has worked to ‘disentangle’ the established relationship between schools and local government, returning

the education system to a 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘patchwork model’ (p.92) of multiple school types and providers.

The United Kingdom’s so-called ‘golden age of the welfare state’ (Wincott, 2013) began with a series of progressive legislative reforms in the 1940s. This ‘post-war settlement’ was pursued in response to the proposals of the 1942 Beveridge Report, which identified ‘five evils’ of British society: squalor, ignorance, want, idleness, and disease (Abel-Smith, 1992). There followed a new vision for post-war Britain, one which was committed to the ideals of universal welfare, delivered through well-defined programmes of public health, education and housing (Ball, 2016). This vision held together for the next couple of decades but, by the end of the 1970s, there was an appetite for change. Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 and, heavily influenced by the economic theories of the New Right (see Hayek, 2001/1944), set the nation on a new economic path, favouring a smaller state, a marketised system and increased private investment.

The 1980s are seen as a crucial turning-point in Britain’s social and economic policy, away from the post-war ‘liberal’ policies, which focused on full employment and the construction of state welfare systems, towards ‘neoliberal’ policies, which focused upon a restructuring of state apparatus, to remove constraints and create free market economics (Harvey, 2007a). Neoliberalism ‘proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade’ (Harvey, 2007a:2). These radical ideas allowed Thatcher to pursue a new economic strategy, which emphasised laissez-faire individualism and the liberalisation of public services. These neoliberal economic policies, which were launched in the 1980s and have been affirmed by each successive government, advance the ‘corporatisation, commodification and privatization of hitherto public assets’ (Harvey, 2007a:16).

In education, this approach has polarised the debate between those that subscribe to the transformative power of social democracy and social power and those who subscribe to the transformative power of free markets and corporate business power. Harvey (2007a) identifies a tension between the *theory* of neoliberalism, which is suspicious of state power and the *pragmatics* of neoliberalisation, which requires a strong coercive state. As I will demonstrate below, this is a tension which is evident in many aspects of recent education reform in England, particularly the intensification of the standards agenda, in tandem with the expansion of the Academies programme (Chitty, 2014; Ball, 2017). Of particular

significance to this research, and to the growth of the Co-operative schools project, is the philosophical emphasis that neoliberalism places on the individual over the collective or social body. Harvey (2007a) argues that all forms of social and communitarian solidarity have been dissolved and have been replaced by an emphasis on individualism, private property, personal responsibility and family values.

This ‘neoliberal turn’ (Harvey, 2007a) has initiated a series of radical reforms to education, which have been progressed by all subsequent governments, accomplished with a rhetoric of ‘crisis’ and a market solution of autonomy, choice and innovation (Chitty, 2014; Ball, 2017). Almost forty years on, there are a plethora of school structures (Courtney, 2015) offering varying degrees of autonomy and a raft of regulatory and accountability measures (Ball, 2017).

## **2.2 The beginnings of a marketised schools sector**

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) represents a significant turning point (Tomlinson, 2005; Whitty, 2008). This was a comprehensive piece of legislation, which awarded the secretary of state 451 new powers, and aimed to transform education ‘from a public to a private good’ (Ball, 2008b). Chitty (2014) observes that the ERA, with its policy goals of ‘choice’ and ‘diversity’, was a ‘decisive break’ (p.51) with the ideals that had founded the education service in 1944. This reform, and its far-reaching consequences, worked to create a ‘quasi-market’ (Bartlett and Grand, 1993) within the school system. A process was set in motion through: the introduction of national testing and league tables, the development of the national curriculum, the introduction of ‘per pupil’ funding, the local management of school budgets (LMS), and the compelling idea of ‘parent choice’ (Chitty, 1997, 2014; Ball, 2008b; Whitty, 2008). It is not possible to examine each of these developments here, however it is important to understand how the contemporary sector – and particularly the concept of the ‘self-improving system’ (DFE, 2010) – has evolved from these early processes of marketisation. Particularly significant to the development of both the Academies programme and the Co-operative schools project was the introduction of two new school types: the City Technology College (CTC) and the grant-maintained (GM) school. Each of these new schools models involved independence from the local education authority, greater powers for governing bodies and closer links with private business (Walford, 2000).

City Technology Colleges were launched as new secondary schools for deprived urban areas, with funding drawn from a combination of private investment and central government funding. They were, ‘a conscious attempt to create a ‘new kind of school’ oriented explicitly



towards an enterprise culture driven forward by high technology' (Edwards and Whitty, 1997:7). These schools, which were to operate independently of local authorities, were introduced in order to 'point the way towards a system of self-governing schools' (p.7). They had new buildings, a specialist curriculum and a longer school day. The CTC model was the forerunner to New Labour's City Academies and also to the contemporary 'sponsored' academy model – in that they were 'funded directly via a contract with central government and owned by a non-public body' (West and Bailey, 2013:140). Warnock (1991) is critical of the programme and suggests that political expectations far exceeded the reality of the new schools. She writes, '[t]hey seem to be selective; few are in inner cities, and they are mainly established by government funds. They certainly do not seem to be much of a safety net for the disadvantaged' (p.151).

Grant-maintained status was introduced for existing schools. It represented a change to governance arrangements, offering schools the opportunity to 'opt-out' of local authority control, assume independent governance and take responsibility for their own admissions (Woods et al., 1998). The choice of grant-maintained status was enacted through parent ballots (Adonis, 2012). Edwards and Whitty (1997) suggest that the introduction of GM schools was 'the largest move towards a market of autonomous and differentiated schools' which enabled the removal of a school from its local authority 'through the exercise of a collective consumer voice in favour of self-government' (p.9). Just as the CTC provided a pathway for the eventual emergence of the 'sponsored' academy school, so the grant-maintained school set the precedent for two further models – the foundation 'trust' school and the newer 'convertor' academy. Under New Labour, in 2005, the grant-maintained schools became foundation 'trusts', a semi-independent model that was partially returned to the local authority but retained its business partnerships, had control of its land and assets, and took responsibility for staffing and admissions (DFES, 2005b; Hatcher, 2007). This model enabled the Co-operative movement to secure its more informal work with schools and position the co-operative foundation trust as an alternative to academisation (Thorpe, 2011; Shaw, 2015). The key principles of the original grant-maintained school were eventually revived by the development of the 'convertor' academy model in 2010 (Baker, 2010). The provision for high-performing schools to 'opt-out' of the local authority and manage their independent estates is part of the radical expansion of the Academies programme, which occurred from 2010 (see discussion below).

The introduction of the new funding formula (LMS), which transferred the responsibility of school budgets to the schools themselves, and the introduction of CTCs and GM schools,

which had no ties with the local authorities, meant that significant structural changes to local arrangements were achieved. Barker (2008), a head teacher during the 80s, admits that he ‘failed to understand’ and ‘did not grasp’ (p.670) the extent to which the education imperatives were changing around him. He writes, ‘[t]here was shock as the education world woke up to the full implications of the 1988 Education Act’ (p.670). By simultaneously introducing so many layers of competition the legislation of the 1980s created ‘a framework for an education market’ (Ball, 2012b) which opened up further opportunities for reform at a later date and which are now being fully realized in the contemporary Academies programme.

### **2.3 Excellence, standards, specialism and diversity**

New Labour came to power in 1997, following an election campaign which promised ‘education, education, education’ as a top priority for the country. The new government quickly issued the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DFE, 1997), outlining a radical education agenda, which emphasised ‘excellence’, ‘standards’, ‘specialism’ and ‘diversity’. The proposals included plans to: introduce national performance targets for 11 year olds, introduce a primary school focus on literacy and numeracy, ‘modernise’ a number of comprehensive principles (including the introduction of setting by ability), introduce twenty-five inner-city Education Action Zones (EAZs), expand the Specialist Schools programme, and roll-out three new structures for state schools. These were the ‘community’ school, the ‘aided’ school and the ‘foundation’ trust school. These proposals were passed into legislation in July 1998.

As it turned out, New Labour took the marketisation programme much further. Gillborn and Youdell (2000) suggest that despite a superficial concern with ‘equality’ the New Labour agenda was a continuation of conservative education policy, maintaining a discourse of ‘standards’, ‘choice’, ‘diversity’ and ‘specialism’. The new legislation allowed the grant-maintained schools to retain their autonomy but returned them back into the local authority as foundation ‘trust’ schools. The relaunch of the Specialist Schools programme emphasised school improvement and collaboration - there were financial incentives made available to schools that pursued this status and admissions policies could incorporate a proportion of selective admissions based in aptitudes in specialist subject (Chitty, 2014).

New Labour’s emphasis on collaborative partnership and co-operation (Bevir and O’Brien, 2001) saw a growth of initiatives that drew expertise from beyond the education sector, for instance the extension of the Specialist Schools programme (DFES, 2005b) and the development of the Extended Schools programme (DFES, 2005a). The former was designed

to help schools develop a distinctive specialism and drew upon private sponsorship and government grants to develop curriculum expertise and co-operation between schools (Bell and West, 2003). The Extended Schools programme sought to emphasise ‘community-oriented schooling’ (Dyson and Raffo, 2007) by joining up services from the public, private and charitable sectors to develop schools as a resource for the whole community (Wilkin et al., 2003). The Extended Schools Programme was launched in 2003 as a ‘wrap-around’ provision, the first wave of schools were located in areas of disadvantage given additional funding (£63,000 to £162,000 per year). This initiative supported schools to provide a comprehensive range of services, to include ‘childcare, health and social care, lifelong learning, family learning, parenting support, study support, sports and arts provision, and information and communications technologies provision’ (DFES, 2005a). As a result of the Extended Schools programme and Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda schools generally became more outward looking and developed a broader focus to include work with the wider community (Raffo and Gunter, 2008).

### **The drive for standards – accountability and performativity**

As the marketisation programme expanded and more opportunities for competition were introduced, there was an increased emphasis on accountability and performance which was expressed in a rhetoric of raising standards. Gillborn and Youdell point to mismatch between the progressive rhetoric and the reality for schools,

The rhetoric sounds progressive, but in practice the result has been to construct a tyranny of standards: all schools must strive continually for more and more success; judged by traditional, biased and elitist criteria, where those who fail to measure up must look to themselves for the cause (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000:18)

School league tables were introduced as one mechanism of accountability, with the objective of improving school performance and providing comparative information to support parent choice in an expanding market. The data presented in school league tables is used to inform routine school inspections, which are carried out by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The secondary school tables use the annual GCSE examination results to summarise and compare the attainment and progress of students in each English secondary school. The attainment measure is calculated as the percentage of students achieving 5 A\*-C grades (including English and maths). The progress measure aims to show the average progress made by students from Y7 to Y11. Leckie and Goldstein (2017) offer an important account of the evolution of school progress measures which have, ‘changed multiple times: from ‘value-added’ (2002–2005) to ‘contextual value-added’ (2006–2010) to ‘expected progress’ (2011–2015) to ‘progress 8’ (2016–)’ (p.193). This move coincided with a new

Ofsted inspection framework (introduced in 2012), which made some schools more vulnerable to forced academisation. The new framework placed greater emphasis on pupil progress, particularly in English and Maths, and it changed the way that progress was to be measured. As the DfE white paper *The Importance of Teaching* outlined,

We will put an end to the current ‘contextual value added’ (CVA) measure. This measure attempts to quantify how well a school does with its pupil population compared to pupils with similar characteristics nationally. However, the measure is difficult for the public to understand, and recent research shows it to be a less strong predictor of success than raw attainment measures. It also has the effect of expecting different levels of progress from different groups of pupils on the basis of their ethnic background, or family circumstances, which we think is wrong in principle (DFE, 2010:68)

Whilst the previous Ofsted framework had considered a contextual value-added measure (CVA), which took into account factors such as socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender, the new framework made no such provision, following the DfE expectation that all students from all backgrounds should make the same amount of progress. This expectation means that it is more difficult for schools serving disadvantaged communities to achieve a high rating (Courtney, 2013). This framework was revised again in September 2012, with specific changes made to the judgement criteria: ‘Satisfactory’ was replaced by ‘Requires Improvement’. A school’s ‘Overall Effectiveness’ could be found to be ‘Requiring Improvement’ where one or more of the four key areas requires improvement.

## **2.4 The Academies Programme**

The English Academies programme was originally launched by New Labour in 2000. The first ‘City Academies’ opened in 2002 and were positioned as a radical solution for a small number of persistently failing secondary schools in urban areas. Since then the programme has evolved and expanded several times over, with the number of academies steadily increasing under New Labour, and then expanding dramatically following the Coalition Academies Act of 2010. An academy is an ‘independent state school’ (DFE, 2010) operating as a charitable trust, which is contractually engaged by central government, regulated by Ofsted, and independent of local authority administration. Academies are the epitome of neoliberal policy in education (Ball, 2009; West and Bailey, 2013); the programme relies upon the competitive marketplace, with an increased role for private finance, and the promise of independence, freedom and autonomy. The political ambition is that all state-funded schools will operate as academies in a self-regulating, self-improving system, where competition drives standards and failing schools close. This is a highly contested vision and the debate has been fierce amongst parents, teachers, governors and academics. Whilst it is clear that

there is political consensus between the two major parties on the issue of academisation, there have been a series of changes of emphasis over time. In the following sections, I outline the key features of the evolving programme and explore the unfolding debate.

Originally introduced in 2000, as a radical solution for underperforming secondary schools in urban areas, the first academies were independent of local authority administration and sponsored by business (West and Bailey, 2013). Although this was a high profile policy, with many critics (Ball, 2009; Gorard, 2009), it was relatively small-scale and just 203 academies were operating by 2010. The expansion of the programme from 2010 has initiated a huge increase in numbers. As of December 2017, the number of open academies stands at 6899 – representing 64% of all secondary schools and 26% of all primary schools (DFE, 2017). The new legislation makes provision for all schools to become academies and grants additional powers to the Secretary of State, including the power to recommend that a poor performing school should become a sponsored academy. An incentivised ‘converter’ model has been introduced, for ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools to convert without sponsorship (DFE, 2010). The expanded programme is highly contested (Gorard, 2011; Gunter, 2011; Gunter and McGinity, 2014) with particular criticism focused upon ‘forced academisation’ (Bailey and Ball, 2016; Ball, 2016), the changing role of the public sector (Simkins et al., 2015), the creation of a democratic deficit (Hatcher, 2011, 2012) and perceived threats to social justice (Lupton, 2011).

### **New Labour Academies**

New Labour’s City Academies were launched in 2000 with the first example opening as Bexley Business Academy in 2002. In 2000, David Blunkett made a speech to the Social Market Foundation in which he announced City Academy school - these were modelled on the CTCs but they were specifically launched to replace and improve failing schools rather than ‘parachuted in like cuckoos in the nest, for good or ill’ (Hansard, 2000). These new schools were to be independent of the local authority and would be sponsored by businesses, charities and philanthropists. It was felt that a handful of failing schools in disadvantaged areas needed a new start and that liberation from the constraints of local government, coupled with investment from the private sector, would enable innovation and lead to success. Between 2000 and 2010 the New Labour government awarded 203 academy contracts - these were highly contested schools. West and Bailey (2013) are at pains to note that the ‘policy change was motivated by a desire to improve the quality of education for children in poor urban areas’ (p.144). The programme grew slowly, beginning with 13 sponsored academies, with a goal of 20 by 2005 (DFES, 2001). From 2004, academies were

linked with the government's *Building Schools for the Future* initiative (Mahony et al., 2011), with incentives for local authorities to include academies in their bids for capital funding.

Following the re-election of the Labour party to government in 2005, the White paper *Higher Standards Better Schools* (DFES, 2005b) states that 'Academies will remain at the heart of the [government's] programme' (p.8) and a new goal of 200 academies was set.

### **Coalition Academies**

In May 2010, a new UK government entered parliament with a radical plan to transform England's schools. The proposals were ambitious and divisive, envisaging profound change to local governance structures and an increased role for business and philanthropy (DfE, 2010). When the Coalition government came to power in 2010 they quickly published the education white paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) in which they announced their intention to 'dramatically extend the academies programme'. The white paper promised a 'new school system', which would be based on the principles of 'autonomy', 'freedom' and 'liberation' and would 'dismantle the apparatus of central control and bureaucratic compliance'. It suggested that all schools, over time, would convert to academy status.

Soon after assuming power in May 2010 the Coalition government passed the Academies Act (2010), which made provision for all schools to become academy schools. The traditional 'sponsored' academy would continue for failing schools but now 'good' and 'outstanding' schools were encouraged to become an academy without sponsorship - these are known as Mark III or 'converter' academies. Provision was also made to relax some of the restraints that had been applied in 2006 returning a full set of 'academy freedoms' and a range of financial incentives for those 'good' and 'outstanding' schools which made an early transition. The stated intention of the Secretary of State for Education was to give schools 'greater freedom' (DfE, 2010) through academisation. These freedoms cover four main areas: freedom from the local authority, freedom from national agreements of pay and conditions, freedom from the constraints of the national Curriculum and, freedom to set the length of the school day and the duration of the school term. Echoing the words of former Prime Minister Blair, the Conservative White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* declares,

It is our ambition that Academy Status should be the norm for all state schools, with all schools enjoying direct funding and full independence from central and local bureaucracy (DfE, 2010:12)

The ensuing Academies Act (2010) provoked a 'new education landscape' (Gilbert et al., 2013) by expanding the existing Academies programme and extending the powers of central government in education. The scale and pace of the academisation programme, launched

with the 2010 legislation, has had a profound effect on the school landscape (Finn, 2015). In 2010, there were 203 *Mark I* and *Mark II* academy schools which had been ‘sponsored’ due to under-performance. By December 2015, 3516 ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools had ‘converted’ to become *Mark III* academies to academy status and a further 1346 schools had become sponsored academies (DFE, 2016). Finn (2015) likens the extent of this structural reform to the 1944 Education Act and suggests that with this single policy move the course of education reform has changed irrevocably in favour of academy schools. Schools have been incentivised and coerced to adopt academy status and the systemic transformation has been profound.

The current Conservative party, which began to exert its influence in the 2010 Coalition Government and from 2015 gained full control of government policy, places great emphasis on freedom from bureaucracy and is ambitious for a fully school-led system. As West and Bailey explain,

The changes that have taken place have resulted in the school-based education system in England changing radically from a national system, locally administered via a democratically elected local education authority, to a centrally controlled system with the Secretary of State for Education having legally binding contractual arrangements with an increasing number of private education providers. The speed and extent of what is in essence a form of privatisation - the transfer of responsibility from the public sector to actors outside - has been remarkable (West and Bailey, 2013:138)

‘Autonomy’ and ‘innovation’ have been the guiding themes of school reform since the late 1980s, successive governments have introduced school types that have had various relationships of independence with the local authority e.g. grant maintained schools, foundation schools and City Technology Colleges. The academy school is the most complete expression of that drive for autonomy and innovation that we have so far seen, with these schools granted specific ‘academy freedoms’.

There are concerns over the ‘democratic deficit’ (Glatter, 2013) of this model - that moving away from the local authority is moving away from democratically elected council involvement in public education; concern over national agreements on pay and conditions; concern about inclusion and fair and equal access. Ball (2009) writes that ‘Academies are one ‘move’ in a more general process of ‘destatisation’ whereby tasks and services previously

undertaken by the state are now being done by various ‘others’ in various kinds of relationships’ (p.101)

Although Warnock (1991) was writing several years before the arrival of the academy school, she identified aspects of a marketised education system that is coming into view in the current expansion of the Academies programme. She is highly critical of a marketised system of education, which relies on a concept of winners and losers:

‘In the market the underdog does not have his day. There is no place for him. So, educationally, there is no place for the dim, the disadvantaged, the disabled or the slow. We may be sorry for them and perhaps at Christmas give a little to a charity that helps them. But they are no longer entitled to the best’ (Warnock, 1991 p.236)

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the British government’s vision for a ‘self-improving system’ (DfE, 2010) of independent academy schools, functioning via the competitive logic of the marketplace. This has been a radical move, which has involved the disruption of established forms of local administration and an increased role for philanthropy and private business. Critics have argued that the pursuit of this vision threatens to dissolve local democracy in education, to narrow curriculum and pedagogical focus and to increase unfairness and inequality across the system. I suggest that these tensions rest on a narrow concept of individuality, which is defined and propagated by dominant neoliberal ideology.





## Chapter 3. Co-operation, the Co-operative movement and co-operative education

*We also entertain the hope that the day is not too far distant when schools will be established in connection with the [Rochdale] society, to educate a rising generation of Co-operators.*

William Cooper, founding Pioneer, 1866 (Bonner, 1961:510)

*There must be a vision, or the co-operative movement will perish: co-operators must have imagination or they will fail ... The creation of this vision, this stirring of the imagination, the development of this confidence, and the fostering of this patience in working for results that are not immediate can be achieved only through education.*

Fred Hall, principal of the Co-operative College, 1919 (Robertson, 2010:131)

Whilst the scope of this chapter is ambitious, it is important to give an overview of co-operation and to understand its influence in the field of education. Such an overview involves consideration of the three aspects in my title: ‘co-operation’, ‘the Co-operative movement’ and ‘co-operative education’. By taking these aspects together, we are able to see how they converge and separate in this story of the Co-operative schools project. However, this is not a straightforward task because ‘co-operation’ is such a ‘slippery concept’ (Amsler, 2015:96), which can be interpreted in multiple ways. The concept of ‘co-operation’ is a general liberal philosophy, which favours consensus and participation, and it is also a specific social movement, with origins in business, enterprise and economics. My research reveals that this dual perspective on co-operation can lead to lack of clarity, particularly in the field of ‘co-operative education’, where co-operation (in general) and the Co-operative movement (in particular) overlap and coincide. A further complication arises when we consider that co-operation (both in general and in particular) touches several academic disciplines but does not ‘belong’ to any one distinct field. This contributes to a sense of ambiguity, and even contradiction, as different emphases and interpretations circulate. This chapter responds to these challenges by presenting an interdisciplinary review, drawing upon sources from within and beyond the academy, including historical documents and ‘grey literature’ (e.g. brochures and reports) produced by the UK Co-operative movement. Throughout this work, my overarching concern is with what makes Co-operative schools distinctive. I am interested in the stated ‘principles and values’ of the Co-operative movement and I ask whether these provide a sufficient theoretical foundation for understanding what co-operation *is* and *how* it works as it moves across disciplines and expands into the English schools sector.

The first section of this chapter introduces the concept of co-operation and describes the emergence and focus of the global Co-operative movement. The second section explores some of the ways that ‘co-operative education’ is understood, beginning with reference to its historical

forms and then tracking it as it manifests both as a contemporary pedagogical approach and as an organisational form. The final section describes the recent growth of the Co-operative schools project in England, which has emerged as both feature of, and resistance to, the processes of education reform and marketisation discussed in the previous chapter.

### **3.1 Understanding the complexity: co-operation or Co-operation?**

The concept of co-operation has application across various disciplines, including economics, politics, philosophy, biology, history and education. Each of these disciplines advances certain assumptions and proposes theoretical ideas, which within their context, work to explain and describe the necessary conditions of, and criteria for, co-operative practice. These multiple variations present significant challenges to the development of a clear understanding and definition of what co-operation *is*, and what difference it makes in the world.

Perhaps it is the case that co-operation's interdisciplinary character reveals its essence. Over the course of this research, 'Co-operators' (that is, those belong to the Co-operative movement) have explained Co-operation as a 'way-of-being', a way of 'working together', which is 'inclusive', 'instinctive' and 'natural'. Writers from 'outside' the Co-operative movement also offer interpretations of co-operation: Nowak (2011) maintains that co-operation is the brighter side of evolution (to competition's darker side), Axelrod (1990) argues that co-operation is an intrinsic part of human nature and Sennett (2013) suggests that co-operation is a vital 'craft' (p.x), essential to the sustenance of everyday life. As I began to think about co-operative education and particularly about the emergence of the Co-operative schools project, I found that I was reluctant to accept 'naturalness' and 'instinct' as justifications for one form of organisation over another. I was also uncertain about the inclusivity of Co-operation, given that there is such a strong 'within the movement' and 'beyond the movement' narrative. Whilst I was prepared to accept the idea of co-operation as a 'way-of-being' and as a way of 'working together' what I was looking for in the literature was an explanation of what Co-operation *is* and *how* it achieves its aims.

Whilst co-operation is understood as a liberal 'way-of-being', which emphasises the mutual benefit of agreement and consensus, there is also an organised social movement of Co-operation. These two forms of co-operation are frequently conflated, but there is a distinction, which turns on the specific principles of the international Co-operative movement. Watkins (1986) elaborates this distinction when he discusses 'big C' and 'small c' co-operation. He suggests that 'co-operation' is commonly understood to mean 'working together' in general,

whereas “Co-operation’ *with a capital C* (p.1, original emphasis) refers to a certain *technique* of working together, which is informed by the ‘Rochdale Principles’ and, more recently, by the Statement of Co-operative Identity, which is codified by the International Co-operatives Alliance (ICA) (Appendix A). This established technique of Co-operation informs the practice of the global Co-operative movement, which traces its origins to nineteenth century England.

Sidney Pollard (1960) identifies two originary strands to the nineteenth century Co-operative movement. He suggests that the first, from 1820-1846, was defined by the writings of Robert Owen and his vision for a Co-operative Commonwealth. The second strand, certainly inspired by the former, but more focused on the principle of the consumer dividend, was the development of Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers in 1844.

### **The Rochdale Pioneers: a foundation myth?**

The story of the Rochdale Pioneers is important, because it acts as a foundation point for the Co-operative movement and, as ‘a story often told’ (Fairbairn, 1994:1), it shapes and inspires contemporary Co-operative practice. Fairbairn, a Co-operative scholar, undertakes a detailed study of the ‘concrete historical reality’ (p.1) of the story but admits that it is also ‘part myth’ (p.1). In a sense, for the purposes of this research, the accuracy of the story is unimportant. What is significant is that a story is repeated and that it operates as ‘an icon or totem for the world co-operative movement, an object of belief and inspiration for millions’ (p.1). As the UK Co-operative movement expanded into the education sector, it turned to the story of the Rochdale Pioneers for a tale of solidarity and overcoming that might inspire schools to join the Co-operative movement. Here I repeat the story, which was first shared with me during an ‘induction’ visit, organised by the Co-operative College, to the Rochdale Pioneers Museum in 2014:

*The ‘Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers’ were a group of 28 working men whose venture, inspired by Robert Owen, initiated the modern Co-operative movement. They responded to the injustices of a corrupt marketplace, where contaminated goods - flour mixed with chalk, grain mixed with stones and tea mixed with dried leaves – were sold to the poor using inaccurate weights and measures. In 1844, the Rochdale Pioneers each invested £1 to establish their own shop on Toad Lane in Rochdale – here they pledged to sell honest goods at honest prices. This was a remarkable challenge to the established order - their personal investment was significant and existing shop owners used their influence to persuade local wholesalers not to do business with them. Undeterred, they travelled further afield to secure their produce and, through their determination and commitment, the business grew and became known for quality produce and fair prices. The Rochdale Pioneers developed the ‘Rochdale Principles’, a set of rules to*

*govern their trading activities, and these served as guideline principles for the successful expansion of their Co-operative model into other enterprises*

There are a number of works of scholarship devoted to recovering the historical accuracies of the early Co-operators (Cole, 1944; Holyoake, 1971; Fairbairn, 1994; Davidson, 2016) and it is certainly the case that the Toad Lane shop inspired the ‘Rochdale Method’, which was to become the framework for Co-operation that is still in use today. A contemporary Co-operative organisation is a member-owned business where the members have joined to protect their shared interests and develop a collective voice.

### **The International Co-operative Alliance and the growth of a global values-based movement**

The Co-operative model spread quickly and in 1895, the International Co-operatives Alliance (ICA) was established to advance the Co-operative model across the globe. The ICA is an ‘apex’ organisation, which currently represents 284 Co-operative federations across 95 countries (International Co-operative Alliance, 2017). Since it formed, the ICA has undertaken three major inquiries to establish the application of Co-operative principles among its members. The most recent of these was in the early nineties when an international consultation incorporated perspectives and dialogue from across the globe. As with the previous inquiries of 1934 and 1966 (Watkins, 1986), this process undertook to distil the operating principles of the contemporary movement and develop a common framework for Co-operative practice, including a global definition and guidelines for ethical and principled Co-operation (MacPherson, 1995). According to the current definition, a co-operative ‘is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise’ (ICA, 1995). A co-operative organisation, affiliating with the Co-operative movement, agrees to conduct itself according to the principles, values and ethics of the movement as outlined in the Co-operative Identity Statement (Appendix A). These are the stated values and principles that guide the contemporary Co-operative movement and to which the recently emerging Co-operative schools project affiliate their practice.

The Co-operative movement is a social movement that reaches across the globe and, whilst the Co-operative business model does not sit easily within mainstream capitalism, it is not an economic irrelevance. In 2013 the world’s largest 300 co-operatives and mutuals reported a total turnover of 2,360 billion US dollars (Co-operative Monitor, 2015). The UK economy also benefits from co-operative enterprise, which makes an annual economy contribution of £34 billion (Co-ops UK, 2016). The United Nations acknowledges the potential of the Co-operative

movement to respond to global socio-economic challenges and the UN General Assembly declared 2012 an International Year of Co-operation. The Co-operative movement views this endorsement as a milestone in its history, reflecting that the recent growth and renewal of co-operatives around the world is indicative of a 21<sup>st</sup> century 'co-operative revival' (Webster et al., 2011).

### 3.2 What is co-operative education?

The concept of 'co-operative education' resists simple definition (Shaw, 2015) and belongs to a broad range of practice including strategies for teaching and learning, curriculum programmes and structures of organisation and governance (Woodin, 2015a). Despite this diversity of form, there is a broad (but not always explicit) commitment to the values of the Co-operative movement, which is suggestive of a deep involvement between the Co-operative movement and co-operative education. This connection is explained by the Co-operative *'fifth principle'*, which emphasises education, training and information. This principle states that,

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation (ICA, 1995).

The *'fifth principle'* reveals a significant tension for the Co-operative movement. On the one hand, Co-operative education is understood to be 'for' members and has the function of preserving the movement through the development of Co-operative knowledge and understanding. On the other hand, the purpose of Co-operative education is to reach beyond the movement with the function of social transformation, and 'a mission of contributing to social change and a more co-operative world' (Shaw, 2015:164). Shaw acknowledges that, whilst education has always been of philosophical importance to the movement, these different imperatives of 'education for preservation' and 'education for transformation' (p.164) are awkward to reconcile and, as a result, co-operative education remains 'ill-defined and little discussed within the movement' (p.173). Vernon (2011) suggests Co-operative education is often understood in a supporting role to that of Co-operative organisation, economics, business and enterprise.

These factors may account for the relative absence of literature within the movement itself (Shaw, 2011; Woodin, 2012), where Co-operative education is discussed, it tends to be limited to statements of intention or to descriptive records of practice. Co-operative historian, Peter Gurney (1996), suggests that where historical accounts exist they are often the work of Co-operative activists and tend to be descriptive and celebratory. The recent development of the Co-

operative schools project in England has sparked academic interest (Woodin, 2012, 2015b; Coates, 2015; Mills, 2015; Davidge, 2016) and this literature will be reviewed in more detail below.

Woodin (2012) offers a snapshot of the present moment in Co-operative education together with a longer view of the Co-operative movement since 1844, he argues that the recent well-spring of Co-operation in English schools is ‘grafted from values and practices which have grown deep roots across the last two centuries’ (p.327). This is the ‘historical tradition’ of Co-operative education to which the contemporary Co-operative schools project turns for anchor (Thorpe, 2011, 2013, Shaw, 2012, 2015). This literature, which is produced by the Co-operative College, strongly suggests that in order to understand the emergence of the Co-operative schools project it is important to understand how Co-operative education has evolved historically.

### **The history of Co-operative education**

The Rochdale Co-operators were committed to the education of working people, a radical tradition that was established by earlier labour organisations during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Johnson, 2013). The Rochdale Society rulebook makes specific reference to education as a means to accomplish the wider vision of ‘self-supporting’ communities of Co-operation,

[A]s soon as practicable, this society shall proceed to arrange the power of production, distribution, education and government, or in other words to establish a self-supporting home-colony of united interests, or assist other societies in establishing such colonies. (Law and Objects of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, 1844 quoted in Cole, 2001:34)

It is evident that the Rochdale Pioneers understood Co-operation as a ‘world-making’ project (Yeo, 1988) and setting up their shop was the first step towards changing the world and creating a new kind of society. George Jacob Holyoake, British secularist and Co-operator, reiterated the primacy of education when he said of the Pioneers: ‘their object was the emancipation of labour from capitalist exploitation. They had no idea of founding a race of grocers but a race of men’ (George Holyoake quoted in Gurney, 1996:63).

Thus, the Rochdale Pioneers understood the transformative potential of education and their vision was that members would flourish and thrive in a new society. They created a reading room and library above the shop at Toad Lane and, from 1852, set aside a regular proportion of their profits to fund educational activity (Yeo, 1988; Robertson, 2010). As other Co-operative societies formed and provided education for their members, different ideas emerged around the extent to which profits should be invested into education at the expense of developing the business.

Todd’s (2013) primary historical research reveals that the Wallsend Co-operative Society was

determined to commit to a wider vision for Co-operation, than merely keeping shop and sharing profits:

This society may be said to take the first place among the stores in Northumberland. They do not merely confine their attention to the sale of tea and coffee, butter and eggs, but seek to elevate the social and intellectual condition of the members. (Co-operative News, April 19, 1873 (citing the Newcastle Chronicle) quoted in Todd, 2013:284)

The Wallsend's Co-operative Society also founded the movement's one and only Co-operative elementary school, bridging a gap in local provision. The Society met the costs of the school, maintaining that, 'Co-operation exists not for the pecuniary advancement of its members merely, but for their moral and intellectual elevation as well' (Co-operative News, January 22, 1873 quoted in Todd, 2013:287).

The Co-operative movement became deeply critical of the state's emerging involvement in education, which began to challenge local Co-operative provision from 1870. In an intriguing parallel to the criticism of contemporary schools as 'exam factories' (Hutchings, 2015), the Co-operative movement disparaged the narrow curriculum of the 'three Rs' and despaired at the introduction of competitive and instrumental pedagogies of cramming and learning by rote that were used by the larger-scale state schools (Gurney, 1996).

The difficult relationship with state education continued and, at the turn of the century, the Co-operative movement vehemently opposed the 1902 Balfour Act, which sought to restructure, standardise and expand state education. Co-operators were against the introduction of distinctive 'elementary' and 'higher' schools, which, they argued, were anti-democratic and would lead to the exclusion of working-class children. An article in the Co-operative News remarked,

[t]he schools are ruining the people wholesale...the worst of compulsory school attendance is that it hands over the children, bound hand and foot, to the unholy influences of greed and trickery (Co-operative News, 5 May 1906, quoted in Gurney, 1996:32)

Many Co-operators felt that state education was emerging as an ideological tool of capitalism 'specifically designed to teach the competitive ethic' (p.32), which would lead to a divided and disempowered working class. The Co-operative movement felt duty bound to challenge that dominance and 'to teach the superiority of alternative principles to its members' (p.32). It is fascinating to hear these echoes from history, as we reflect on the contemporary discourse of the Co-operative schools project in respect to the expansion of the Academies programme.

Vernon (2013) invites us to draw further parallels with the present moment when he points to the longstanding 'symbiotic' relationship between state education and the Co-operative



movement. He illustrates various ways in which the Co-operative movement has compensated for and sought to influence state education since its inception, drawing particular attention to the debates that surrounded the 1902 and the 1918 Education Acts. Vernon notes that the post-war arrangements, following the 1918 legislation, led to a decreased role for Co-operative societies in the provision of education, whereupon the movement stepped back, and focused on the internal transmission of the Co-operative history and principles to its members.

Robertson's (2010) account of the post-war Co-operative movement offers an insight into the local and regional organisation of Co-operative education from 1914-1960. The study reveals a significant variation amongst the Co-operative societies in terms of their investment and commitment to membership education, with the larger societies providing more opportunity. Robertson observes that most societies had a dedicated education committee and finds substantial evidence of education activity within the movement. She notes that whilst there was 'a vast array of educational activities' (p.131) the aim of the committees was to 'foster 'co-op consciousness' among the rank-and-file membership' (p.212). This was achieved through the teaching of the history, structure and aims of the Co-operative movement. Robertson points to the existence of wider educational aims, such as adult education partnerships with worker's unions and the movement's contribution to the campaign for the improvements to state education. However, these are not fully elaborated.

### **Co-operative education as 'co-operative learning'**

Co-operative learning is a pedagogical approach which has its roots in the theories of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky (Battistich and Watson, 2003) and emerged as a dedicated practice from the fields of education and social-psychology in the 1970s (Zahn et al., 1986; Slavin, 1994; Ashman and Gillies, 2003). Co-operative learning is a teaching and learning strategy that promotes collaborative learning; emphasis is placed on student relationships, which are fostered within a wide interpretation of co-operation. Slavin (1994) positions 'TIES' as the cornerstones of his approach, these are: 'team rewards', 'individual accountability' and 'equal opportunities for success'. Kagan's (2001) strategy uses 'PIES' as the organising strategy, these are: 'positive independence', 'individual accountability', 'equal participation' and 'simultaneous interaction'. In each of these interpretations, it is possible to recognise the Co-operative principles of *solidarity*, *responsibility*, *equality*, *responsibility* and *self-help*. However, it is important to note that neither of these co-operative pedagogies are explicitly linked to the Co-operative movement. The fundamental idea of co-operative learning is that students work together and are responsible for both their own, and each other's, progress. In a co-operative classroom, group success rather than individual merit is celebrated and learning is structured in non-competitive ways. In addition to

the academic and curriculum benefits, advocates of the practice also emphasise the potential in this approach to overcome social and emotional barriers to learning (Slavin, 1994; Kagan, 2001; Gillies, 2007). In England, research has been undertaken to map the positive potential of co-operative learning in meeting the objectives of the Every Child Matters agenda (Jolliffe, 2007, 2011).

Co-operative learning is a global practice and several associations have formed to support educators who research and practice co-operative learning in all corners of the globe. The International Association for the Study of Co-operation in Education (IASCE) was established in 1979 and members have access to a forum, a newsletter, online resources and opportunities for networking. There are several other regional associations, such as, British Columbia Co-operation Learning Association (BCCLA), Japan Association for Study of Co-operation in Education (JASCE), and Great Lakes Association for Co-operation in Education (GLACIE).

In recent years, co-operative learning has also become a global edu-business with early proponents Robert Slavin and Spencer Kagan each founding successful curriculum development and school improvement programmes based on their research. The *Success for All Foundation* (*Success for All Foundation*, n.d.) mainly operates in the USA and is currently developing its business in the UK. *Kagan Publishing and Professional Development* (*Kagan Publishing & Professional Development*, n.d.) operates worldwide. Both organisations offer complete ‘school improvement programmes’ and a wide range of workshops and products to develop co-operative learning across all stages of school-age development. My research reveals that the Kagan learning programme is currently a popular choice amongst some English Co-operative schools. However, this programme is not formally endorsed by the Co-operative College, UK.

### **Co-operative higher education**

A number of higher education institutions are beginning to explore potential for co-operative models of organisation and delivery (Cook, 2013). The famous Mondragon Corporation established a co-operative university in 1997 (Matthews, 2013) and academics are exploring other radical models in the UK (Boden et al., 2012; Winn, 2015; Neary and Winn, 2017). There has also been a recent international movement of student unions which seek to structure their work co-operatively; this is examined in the ‘Co-operatives on Campus’ project (Wise et al., 2009). Concurrent with these initiatives, a small number of Co-operative research centres have emerged within traditional universities. For example, The Open University, UK has a dedicated Co-operatives research unit (*Co-operatives Research Unit | Open University*, n.d.), the University of Trento, Italy has established the European Research Institute on Co-operative and Social

Enterprise (*EURICSE*, n.d.) and The University of Victoria, Canada is home to the Centre for Co-operative and Community Based Economy (CCCBE, 2015). These international research centres are committed to the development of knowledge, understanding and innovation in the field of co-operatives and social enterprise.

### 3.3 The emergence of the Co-operative schools project in England

In recent years, the UK Co-operative movement has expanded into the schools sector through the development of the Co-operative schools project. The first Co-operative ‘trust’ school was developed in 2008, followed by a Co-operative ‘sponsor’ academy in 2010 and a Co-operative ‘converter’ model in 2011. These models emphasise the Co-operative values of *self-help*, *self-responsibility*, *democracy*, *equality*, *equity* and *solidarity*. The Co-operative school models are positioned as a ‘values-based’ alternative to neoliberal school models and have been very popular. In 2015, the Co-operative College estimated a network of 850 schools, although this figure was reduced to 600 in spring 2017<sup>2</sup>. This highly contemporary project is promoted in publications produced by the Co-operative movement; it has been celebrated in the national media and it has been followed closely by a few committed academics. I have consulted all available literature, which, at the time of writing, is relatively sparse. In order to give the fullest possible account of these developments, I draw upon academic research in combination with a range of grey literature produced by the Co-operative movement and other interested parties.

#### The vision and the groundwork

In order to trace the Co-operative schools project from its beginnings it is illuminating to return to a report produced by the Co-operative College in 2003. *Co-operation and Learning* (Wilson and Taylor, 2003) makes a clear case for the involvement of the Co-operative movement in England’s education system. It argues that ‘education is too important to be left only to state or private sector provision’ (p.6), suggesting that education is an ‘under-realised opportunity’ (p.6) for Co-operative enterprise and that Co-operative enterprise is an ‘under-realised resource’ (p.6) for education. It sets out to ‘extend the boundaries of co-operation further – taking the co-operative advantage to the education sector’ (p.7). With hindsight, it is possible to view this booklet as a foundation document for the Co-operative schools project, setting out a vision for Co-operative schools that remained broadly unchanged over the next decade. It claims shared ‘common values’ (p.6) between the Co-operative movement and the public sector, and makes proposals for ‘a mutual support strategy’, ‘much more effective utilisation of school premises’ and the formation of collaborative

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<sup>2</sup> Co-operative Foundation Trust Schools: 532; Co-operative ‘converter’ academies: 57; Co-operative ‘sponsored’ academies: 11. Figures provided by the Co-operative College, UK in April 2017

partnerships ‘to improve procurement, share skills and resources and jointly develop a range of services’ (p.6). The following extract details the credentials and expertise of the Co-operative movement, which, the document claims, will ‘add value’ to the education sector:

The co-operative movement is an under-realised asset, which can add value to others in the education field. It has a long established presence in the education sector, developed from its historical commitment to education. Co-operative learning methodologies and the co-operative movement’s own democratic traditions and values are particularly relevant to developing active citizenship. Co-operatives are already involved in the direct provision of learning to their members and staff and are starting to develop partnership relationships with other educational providers (Wilson and Taylor, 2003:6)

The document highlights the potential that there is for the Co-operative movement to ‘engage positively’ (p.6) with opportunities opening up within the schools sector. There is a specific focus on New Labour’s Specialist Schools programme (DFES, 2001; Bell and West, 2003), a school improvement initiative that invited business sponsors to bring their expertise into the school sector. The document observes that, ‘[s]uch sponsorship would provide considerable influence over the ethos of the school, such as creating a co-operative mutual, ethical and social enterprise input to the business curriculum’ (Wilson and Taylor, 2003:14). The Co-operative Group had concerns about the ‘invisibility’ (Wilson and Mills, 2007:12) of Co-operatives amongst the younger generation and raising this awareness was a primary motivation for the expansion into the schools sector. One of the outcomes of this report was a significant investment from the Co-operative Group, via the Co-operative Fund, to develop Co-operation in the schools sector.

In 2004, The Co-operative Group began its sponsorship of ten Co-operative Business and Enterprise Specialist Schools. The Co-operative Group commissioned the Co-operative College to grow a network between these schools and develop specialist curriculum resources. This was internally recognised as a successful endeavour through which the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College established important relationships, developed expertise in specific curriculum areas and launched the impressive Young Co-operatives project, an initiative which supports pupils to undertake small-scale enterprise projects within their schools (Wilson and Mills, 2007; Thorpe, 2011; Woodin, 2015c). Woodin (2012) suggests that these successes led to an ‘expanding optimism’ (p.332) within the movement and ‘acted as a seedbed from which a number of strands would sprout in the coming years’ (p.331).

In 2007, the Co-operative College published *Co-operative Values Make a Difference* (Wilson and Mills, 2007), with a foreword by Ed Balls MP, then Secretary of State for Children Schools and Families. This report celebrates the successes of the Business and Enterprise Specialist Schools and makes the case for the Co-operative ‘trust’ model, which was in development and had the

clear support of the government. The document presents information and case studies from the Business and Enterprise network, which offer positive illustrations of small-scale projects within the schools, involving a single aspect of school life such as, 'Enterprise Week', the Citizenship curriculum and various Fair Trade projects (pp.16-29). Across the report there is a sense in which 'the values', in and of themselves, are transformative for schools but it is not clear how transformation might occur and what the claims are founded on. The report suggests that,

[a]ctive engagement and a clear set of values that resonated with the schools, were the formulas for success. That set of values and commitment to active engagement was also one of the reasons why many of the schools became part of the network and clearly wanted to work with co-operative enterprises (Wilson and Mills, 2007)

In this document we learn that the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College were 'actively supporting the development of a co-operative model for trust schools' (Wilson and Mills, 2007:49) and were working with schools that were part of the government's Pathfinder Schools programme. There is repeated reference to the 'potential' and the 'opportunity' (p.10) of Co-operative models, which would 'build on traditional public sector values' (p.10) and 'actively engage the local community in running key services' (p.10). The document sketches the proposed 'architecture of the trust' (p.47) and claims that 'a co-operative model is capable of meeting all of the key policy objectives' (p.48). The report ends with an ambitious vision for the Co-operative schools project, which was partially realised within two years of its publication:

[P]otential exists not just for single schools, but for local clusters under a single trust, and in the longer term, groupings of schools throughout England organised through a single co-operative trust, with a shared ethos based on co-operative values (p.49)

### ***New Labour and the Co-operative schools project***

With support from the New Labour's Pathfinder Programme, the first Co-operative 'trust' school opened in 2008. The following year, the government published *Co-operative Schools – making a difference* (DCSF, 2009), a booklet that reads as a ringing endorsement of the Co-operative schools project. This 23-page document provides detailed information about the Co-operative schools project, including several short case studies of Co-operative trust schools and schools that were part of the Specialist Co-operative schools network. There are details of the planned Co-operative 'sponsor' academies, which opened the following year. Several pages are devoted to an explanation of the processes involved in converting to Co-operative 'trust' status and there is a government pledge of additional funds for the first 100 pilot schools that adopt the model. In the foreword, the Secretary of State for Education, Ed Balls MP, writes:

Involving parents, the local community and external partners in the governance of schools can have a huge impact on standards. That is why I want to see more schools

based on the principles of social enterprise and co-operation ... That is why we have launched our co-operative Trust school pilot in September last year to involve 100 schools, and why we are encouraging more partners like the Co-operative Group to sponsor Academies (p.3)

The document explains that all new trust schools receive a grant of £10,000 to support the cost of setting up a trust, and that those which adopt a Co-operative model will be able to apply for an additional £5,000 'to engage consultants to assist in developing this innovative model' (p.21). In the final pages of the document, we are told that the government is supporting Co-operative school models because they represent, 'a unique opportunity to build a school ethos around co-operative values' (p.21). The government anticipates that this approach will 'create more opportunities for pupils' and will offer 'the community a way of getting involved in the running of the school, ensuring that decisions made by the school benefit the community as a whole' (p.21).

As the Co-operative schools project expanded into the schools sector there can be little doubt that this support from New Labour was influential, both in terms of the additional funding commitment but also, crucially, in the embrace of the title message: '*Co-operative Schools: making a difference*'. It is also important to note that this document advises schools that 'trust status is one of the structural solutions proposed for low performing schools by the school improvement programme 'National Challenge' (p.6). Thus, this DCSF booklet provides a mixture of endorsement, incentive and imperative, which, I argue, was specifically designed to appeal to the 'National Challenge' schools. In the two years that followed this publication, several hundred schools turned to the Co-operative schools project and converted to Co-operative trust status.

### **The Co-operative school models and the Schools Co-operative Society**

The investment of significant resources from the Co-operative Group, the Co-operative College and the New Labour government, led to the development of three distinct Co-operative school models and to the formation of the Schools Co-operative Society (SCS). SCS is an 'apex' Co-operative of Co-operative schools, which was established to act as a co-ordinating body for the growing network. Before giving an account of the literature covering the emergence and growth of the Co-operative schools project, it will be useful to outline these specific structural features.

#### ***Co-operative 'trust' schools***

A Co-operative 'trust' school is a state-funded school that receives funding via the local authority and is governed by a charitable Co-operative trust, which takes ownership of land and assets and is responsible for the employment of staff (Shaw, 2012). A Co-operative 'trust' school is part of the local authority education provision and it is subject to local admissions and monitoring

procedures. A Co-operative clause is in place to ensure that the school structure and practices are configured in accordance with the Co-operative values and principles, and a Co-operative ‘forum’ is established to represent the views of all stakeholders. As with all of the English Co-operative school models, the ‘trust’ school is a ‘hybrid’ Co-operative (Birchall, 2011; Woodin, 2015c) in which Co-operative ideas and structures are adopted and applied to already existing mainstream institutions. Writing in 2011, Birchall (2011) is unconvinced by the ‘multi-stakeholder’ Co-operative ‘trust’ schools, suggesting that their previous status and continuing relationship with the local authority means that they are a compromise and he predicts, on these grounds, that membership will be hard to establish.

### ***Co-operative ‘sponsor’ academies***

The Co-operative ‘sponsor’ academy is a state-funded academy that receives funding via central government and is, additionally, sponsored by a Co-operative business. This is a standard academy model, which has independence from the local authority and is free to undertake all business and administration decisions. Unlike, the ‘converter’ model, which was to follow a little later, there is no ‘Co-operative clause’ in the legal structure of the Co-operative ‘sponsor’ academy model.

In the last days of the New Labour government, The Co-operative Group was persuaded to become an academy sponsor. The first two Co-operative ‘sponsor’ academies opened in 2010. In 2013, The Co-operative Group established the Co-operative Academies Trust and appointed a Director of Education to lead the initiative and drive the academy programme forward (The Co-operative Group, 2013). The Co-operative Academies Trust currently comprises of nine primary and secondary academies in Leeds, Manchester and Stoke.

In 2013, the Schools Co-operative Society became the sponsor of three Co-operative ‘sponsor’ academies. These are known collectively as the Y/our multi-academy trust.

### ***Co-operative ‘converter’ academies***

In 2010, the new Coalition government expanded the Academies programme and offered heavy incentives for ‘good’ and ‘outstanding’ schools to pursue academy status. In response to demand from a small group of Co-operative ‘trust’ schools, who wanted to retain their co-operative credentials but take advantage of the ‘freedoms’ promised in the new legislation, the Co-operative College developed a Co-operative ‘converter’ model.

A Co-operative ‘converter’ academy is a state-funded academy that is contractually engaged by the Department for Education and receives central government funding. All ‘converter’ academies are independent of local authority administration and free to undertake all business

and administration decisions (see Chapter 2). The Co-operative ‘converter’ academy model has an additional ‘Co-operative clause’ in the legal Articles of Association, which stipulates a commitment to the values and principles of the Co-operative movement and the creation of a Co-operative ‘forum’ to ensure accountability to the stakeholder members. From 2010, The Co-operative College offered a ‘comprehensive package of consultancy and project management services to support schools throughout the process of conversion’ (Co-operative College, n.d).

### ***Schools Co-operative Society***

As the Co-operative schools project expanded, The Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College, along with a number of Co-operative ‘trust’ schools, recognised the need for an independent co-ordinating body. Woodin (2012) describes how the Schools Co-operative Society (SCS) ‘grew out of increasing levels of informal association’ (p.335) between schools. It was formally constituted in 2009, as a ‘lobbying body, social movement network and a provider of services’ (Woodin, 2015a:6). As the apex body of Co-operative schools in England, it exists to ‘drive the strategy, profile building and networking for all co-operative schools’ (The Co-operative Group, 2010:56). Despite ambitions for independence, The Co-operative Group provided ‘financial and in-kind support’ until 2015. There were also close links between SCS and the Co-operative College until 2016, with the latter providing clerking and governance support to the SCS board from 2009, and a number of instances where self-employed consultants were deployed across both organisations (see Chapter 6).

### ***The expansion of the Co-operative schools project – a critical review***

During 2010, the Co-operative College published *Co-operative Schools: Stronger together* (Co-operative College, 2010) in order to provide information on the Co-operative schools project to the education sector. The language of this promotional document is ebullient and suggests that ‘[a]ll over England schools are using co-operative values to unlock relationships with parents, staff and students’ (p.2). It claims that ‘the co-operative approach is a real alternative to the top down one-size fits all society which has dominated in recent years’ (p.2) and it makes reference to an international landscape ‘where co-operation is playing a central role in reforming public services, building communities and dealing with social problems’ (p.2). There is an excited and breathless tone to the publication, which is particularly evident in the following extract,

This movement is really starting to take hold, and building a distinct values driven co-operative grouping within the school system. Co-operation within and between schools is sweeping across England, with more schools joining every month. Co-operative schools are starting to release the huge pent up potential for schools to take more responsibility to improve themselves: to build a strong sense of a school and professional community of teachers and support staff working together to help one another. This is based on



embedding co-operative values into the curriculum, life and ethos of schools and building it into their governance. This wave of self-improvement is also driven by schools interacting with their communities and with society as a whole and is helping them to realise their potential to be a true hub for their communities (p.3)

Although both the Co-operative 'trust' model and the Co-operative 'converter' models are presented in this publication, the 'trust' model is more enthusiastically promoted. The advent of the academy 'converter' model is explained in rather ambivalent terms: 'the co-operative academy model was developed in partnership with a group of co-operative Trust schools that wanted to pursue academy status in view of the additional freedoms and funding available, whilst maintaining the essential characteristics of co-operative trusts' (p.6).

By 2011, the Coalition government's expansion of the Academies programme was in full swing and it is possible to detect a changed attitude in the literature, particularly with regard to academies. Thorpe (2011), writing in the *Journal of Co-operative Studies*, positions the co-operative schools as 'a potential alternative to the Coalition Government's marketisation policy which is pushing both secondary, and now primary, schools down the route to Academy status' (p.57). The article touches on the benefits of the Co-operative models and suggests that the values provide a 'common ideology' (p.61) which link the schools together. The Co-operative 'converter' academy is explained in terms that are less than positive, '[a] number of co-operative trust schools recognised the inevitability of the Coalition Government's plans and decided that it would be preferable to jump before they were pushed' (p.60). The article insists that,

'[t]here is no single, one-size-fits-all, model of a co-operative school. A range of co-operative governance models have emerged and a growing number of schools are shaping their curriculum, pedagogy and ethos based on the values and principles established by the co-operative movement' (p.61)

Ending on a political note, Thorpe suggests that the biggest threat to Co-operative schools now comes from the Department for Education. She observes that, in contrast to the previously supportive New Labour government, the Coalition 'has proved less enthusiastic, stymying the development of the co-operative schools movement at every opportunity' (p.61).

Audsley and Cook (2012) position the Co-operative schools project as 'a social democratic alternative' (p.324) to academisation, highlighting the particular appeal of co-operative models within the teaching profession suggesting that teachers 'feel simultaneously excited and empowered by the freedoms these reforms provide' (p.325). Audsley and Cook acknowledge that the Co-operative project is in the early phase of development but suggest that it offers 'a vision of a different future for schools' (p.325). They are explicit in their sense of hope: '[j]ustice

and democracy demand transparency and accountability in school governance, and the emerging co-operative model offer hope that such demands can be satisfied' (p.325).

Woodin (2012) approaches the 'co-operative experiment' (p.327) with cautious optimism, and points to the 'shades of co-operation' (p.333) which exist amongst the co-operative schools. He writes that, 'different motivations can be identified among co-operative schools, from a core group which has used co-operation to improve education and participation, to one that is more loosely associated with the concept, perhaps seeing co-operation as means to defend existing ways of working' (p.333). Woodin draws particular attention to the aspirational vision that was circulated by the Co-operative College,

The added value which co-operative values and principles bring to these schools is a debatable issue. The Co-operative College has suggested that a definition of co-operative schools should be based upon a co-operative approach to governance, curriculum, ethos and pedagogy. This aspirational classification of co-operative schools is forward looking and outlines the path along which it is hoped schools will travel (p.333)

Facer et al. (2012) suggest that whilst the concept of Co-operation often acts as a 'rallying point' for left-wing educationalists they warn that there is a lack of 'shared understanding of what Co-operative education actually means' nor is there a 'shared understanding of how these values will take form in the ethos, curriculum, pedagogy and governance of Co-operative education' (p.336). The paper points to a significant sense of 'ambiguity' which carries risk as well as a sense of possibility.

As the Co-operative schools project expanded there were ambiguities between the ideals of the Co-operative movement and other forms of co-operation that were always already in place - these ambiguities become tensions in the struggle over Co-operative brand identity and genuine co-operative practice. There is a sense in which 'small c' co-operation overlaps and coincides with the Co-operative vision for schools. Pring (2015) reminds us that co-operation is always occurring in education. He draws upon historical examples of 'small c' co-operation in various curriculum projects, suggesting that co-operation is part of the historical and philosophical fabric of schools and their local education authorities.

Labour's (2014) policy review, conducted by David Blunkett, recommends that 'collaboration' is the future for the English school system. Whilst the report offers no explicit support for the Co-operative schools project, it does make repeated reference to 'co-operation' and appears to commit to the idea of co-operation in the English school system. Blunkett writes, '[o]ur task in

the future will be to facilitate co-operation, matching the dynamic of world class leadership with the imperative of a partnership approach and co-operation between schools' (p.225).

As the Co-operative schools project expanded, the Co-operative College developed a small range of training packages, curriculum resources and initiatives, which were available for schools to purchase. These were: *Your Co-operative Trust: making it work* (Gardner et al., 2013); *Company Secretary Training*; *Making it work: the first 18 months of a co-operative school*; *Co-operative Identity Mark* (a peer-assessed quality framework to support the transition to a values-based organisation). There was also a small range Co-operative curriculum resources, which were linked to subject areas such as citizenship, business and enterprise and PSHE.

## **Conclusion: co-operation under theorised**

The purpose of this chapter has been to offer an overview of co-operation and to explore its influence in the field of education. I have reviewed the literature as it relates to the Co-operative movement, co-operative education and the recently emerging Co-operative schools project. This review demonstrates the complexity of the areas under discussion and of the concepts involved. There are numerous uncertainties, tensions and overlaps, in both historical and contemporary research. My study reveals that there is no extant 'theory of co-operation', nor any specific philosophical tradition, to provide a theoretical basis for the work of the Co-operative movement. I showed how Co-operation is a concept born of practical activity, which has developed over time – inspired by the writings of Robert Owen and then reified by the early Co-operators, who have an almost mythical status within the contemporary movement.

The literature shows a deep historical connection between education and the Co-operative movement and also that the purpose of this connection has never been settled – on the one hand, Co-operative education is seen as a necessity for the preservation of the Co-operative movement and, on the other, it is seen as a tool of wider social transformation. This debate continues, unresolved, in the recent expansion of the Co-operative movement into the English schools sector. The available literature on the emerging Co-operative schools project points to areas of complexity and a confused or unclear purpose. On the one hand, there is a sense of hope and optimism around the potential of these 'values-based' school models to challenge aspects of the prevailing system, such as the focus on competition, by offering an 'alternative'. On the other hand, it is notable that the Co-operative schools project has emerged in response to policy shifts and that, despite the positioning of the project as a 'values-based alternative' to

neoliberal marketisation and competition, it includes two routes that fit the academisation agenda. This contributes to the complexity, confusion and tension.

The literature suggests that a Co-operative school has an ethical character, the fundamental basis of which is drawn from the globally shared Co-operative values. MacPherson (2011) discourages us from dismissing these values as banal, suggesting instead that, ‘they carry easily overlooked tensions and challenges. They create a burden of commitment, limits on what is acceptable and stimulants for what is possible’ (p.219). This chapter has shown how the values and principles of the Co-operative movement are grounded in the ideals of the early Co-operators and have been subsequently developed through an international consensus of Co-operative work. They are reified in practice and action, but they do not in themselves constitute an adequate theory of co-operation, they do not offer a sufficient explanation of the Co-operative difference nor a sufficient defence of co-operative practice. I argue that this opens the space for challenge and vulnerability, where the values and principles can be easily sidelined, or overlooked as ‘fluffy’ and idealistic, when the pressures of more robust and dominant theories exert themselves. Ratner (2015) suggests that the absence of a political philosophy means that co-operation is vulnerable to co-optation,

Co-ops are vulnerable to co-optation because they lack a political philosophy that can guide genuine cooperation and counter non-cooperative influences (Ratner, 2015:18)

In the next chapter, I turn to the political philosophy of Spinoza for a theory of *co-operative power*, which might work to underpin the Co-operative schools project, ‘guide genuine co-operation’, and provide theoretical resources with which to counter ‘non-cooperative influences’. I propose that Spinoza provides us with an ontology of co-operation through which we can approach the tensions and complexities and, ultimately, lead towards an exploration of the transformative potential of co-operative pedagogy.



## Chapter 4. Spinoza: towards a theory of co-operative power

*The Ethics is necessarily an ethics of joy: only joy is worthwhile, joy remains, bringing us near to action, and to the bliss of action.*  
(Deleuze, 1988:28)

*In the broad sense, every philosophy is practical and political: an Ethics.*  
(Althusser, 1967:196)

*[t]he atomic individual is the purest of fictions.*  
(Montag, 1998: xviii)

In this chapter, I turn to the philosophy of Benedict de Spinoza for the tools to interpret and analyse the emergent Co-operative schools project and, in particular, the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy model. The previous chapters showed how the Co-operative movement entered the rapidly reforming sector with a Co-operative vision for education – a legal model has been created and schools have been inspired to convert to academy status and become part of ‘the co-operative schools movement’ (Woodin, 2015c). In Chapter 2, I outlined the British government’s vision for a ‘self-improving system’ (DFE, 2010) of independent academy schools, functioning via the competitive logic of the marketplace. This is a radical move, which entails the disruption of established forms of local administration and an increased role for philanthropy and private business. Critics argue that the pursuit of this vision threatens to dissolve local democracy in education, to narrow curriculum and pedagogical focus, and to increase unfairness and inequality across the system. I argued that a dominant neoliberal ideology defines and propagates the narrow concept of individuality upon which these tensions rest. In Chapter 3, I described the emergence of the Co-operative schools project, which is positioned as a resistance and alternative to the expanding Academies programme. The Co-operative movement suggests that the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy model offers a way of *resisting* the neoliberal reform agenda by providing a Co-operative *alternative* within the corporate and competitive logic of the marketplace. However, enabled by the neoliberal policies that it seeks to resist, the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy appears to have a contradictory identity. It has emerged in response to a legislative moment, with a promise of resistance, but it is not clear how it can articulate itself as an alternative within the wider landscape. Does it have the ontological resources to express the hoped-for vision, or is that vision inevitably compromised?

I propose that Spinoza provides us with an ontology of co-operation through which we can approach the issues at hand and explore the transformative potential of the Co-operative

‘converter’ academy model. I will show how Spinoza’s philosophy ‘escapes’ (Williams, 2007) the reductive binaries of neoliberal school reform e.g. private/public, individual/collective, competition/co-operation. These confine attempts to undertake creative and experimental approaches, and condemn us to ‘the tyranny of no alternative’ (Fielding and Moss, 2010; Mills, 2015). In contrast, Spinoza offers an expansive notion of individuality and proposes a relational system, which opens towards a theory of co-operation. This theoretical grounding, in Spinoza’s philosophy of radical immanence, moves beyond narrow conceptions of individuality and ‘pre-established ideas of harmony’ (EIAP). It enables the consideration of a dynamic collective individual, which might better serve the co-operative imagination.

I begin by introducing Spinoza’s philosophy in the context of his own lifetime and I offer a description of the geometrical method of the *Ethics*. I go on to outline pertinent aspects of this work, anchoring my reading through the ethico-political interpretations of Balibar (1997, 1998) and Deleuze (1988, 1990, 1997). The particular purpose of this reading is to explicate Spinoza’s idea of the collective individual, which Balibar (1997) calls the transindividual, as the operative concept of Spinoza’s theory of co-operation. Beginning with an orientation in Spinoza’s metaphysics, I outline the nature of God and the universe. Then I follow the logic of transindividuality as it emerges, first as a scheme of causality, and then as a process of integration between simple and complex bodies. I go on to introduce Spinoza’s *conatus* and explore the transindividual relationship between imagination and reason. As I track this reading I weave in key insights from Deleuze, who offers an expansive interpretation of the *Ethics* and a useful account of Spinoza’s tripartite theory of knowledge as signs or affects (imagination), notions or concepts (reason) and essences or percepts (intuition) (Deleuze, 1997). In the final section, I consider the ways in which Spinoza’s philosophy is relevant to the contemporary case of the Co-operative schools project. I show how his ideas are interpreted differently in the traditions of liberalism and communitarianism, and I argue that these approaches force the reductive binaries that work to curtail the possibility of genuine co-operation. Finally, I develop a framework for the interpretation and analysis of the Co-operative schools project in Chapters 6 and 7. Spinoza’s theory of the collective individual is central to this framework and I draw, particularly, on the concepts of *conatus*, *affect* (e.g. hope and fear) and *common notions*. I further refine these tools by drawing upon various ideas in

contemporary Spinozist scholarship, for example James's (2010) work on the role of narrative and Rovere's (2017) work on the nature of pedagogy.

#### 4.1 Introducing Spinoza

Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677) was born into the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic, a vibrant centre of trade and an early market state. The very first years of the 17th century saw the emergence of the Dutch East India Company, the Amsterdam Stock Exchange and the Bank of Amsterdam; these were the world's first multinational corporation, stock exchange and bank. It is enticing to reflect on this particular context and to make connections with a present moment so defined by economics and marketisation. Lloyd (1996) observes that the new Dutch Republic was emerging from Spanish rule with a new identity and a culture 'thickly-layered with dualities' (p.4). She describes this historical moment as one rich with 'tensions and movements between opposites' (p.4). Isreal (2001) describes a period of significant economic change, social upheaval and political unrest. Whilst Spinoza is not overtly preoccupied with economic matters, in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (Spinoza, 2002/1677) he does offer some insights into the role of money and its place in his philosophical system. In this early work, Spinoza reflects on the 'hollowness and futility' (p.3) of a life spent in pursuit of honour and wealth, and he sets out to 'to enquire whether there existed a true good' (p.3) which might serve as a 'new guiding principle' (p.3). He begins by marking out the nature and scope of his philosophical project:

This, then, is the end for which I strive, to acquire the nature I have described and to endeavour that *many should acquire it along with me*. That is to say, *my own happiness involves my making an effort to persuade many others to think as I do*, so that their understanding and their desire should entirely accord with my understanding and my desire. To bring this about, it is necessary (1) to understand as much about Nature as suffices for acquiring such a nature, and (2) *to establish such a social order as will enable as many as possible to reach this goal* with the greatest possible ease and assurance. Furthermore, (3) *attention must be paid to moral philosophy and likewise the theory of the education of children*; and since health is of no little importance in attaining this end, (4) the whole science of medicine must be elaborated. And since many difficult tasks are rendered easy by contrivance in our daily lives, (5) the science of mechanics is in no way to be despised. (p.6, my italics)

Here it is possible to see the beginnings of the thought that comes to fruition in his posthumously published *Ethics*, where his most detailed and considered philosophical system is elaborated. I have italicised the parts of the passage that are most connected to the purpose of linking Spinoza's thought with modern expressions of Co-operation. From the outset we can see that Spinoza's project is a social one, the 'supreme good' which he seeks can only be found 'along with' others and involves those others sharing in the same



priorities. This is a key point for Spinoza, and one that is relevant to the study of the Co-operative schools project; there must be a shared idea of the ‘good’ for which we all strive (LeBuffe, 2010). He also points to the importance of the creation of a ‘social order’, which will ‘enable’ the achievement of the shared goal, and he suggests that both a moral and pedagogical process will be necessary – whilst these processes are not specifically elaborated by Spinoza, my analysis turns to contemporary scholarship for interpretation (Leask, 2017; O'Donnell, 2017; Rovere, 2017; Tamboukou, 2017). The above passage makes clear that Spinoza understands his project as one of transformation. Isreal (2001) suggests that Spinoza sought to transform the world through his philosophical system and the final passage of the *Ethics* suggests that the proposed schema will offer ‘salvation’ to the committed (VP42S). It is interesting to note that this idea of salvation is also present in Robert Owen’s understanding of the transformative potential of co-operation (Owen, 1991).

### **The geometrical method and beginning in the middle**

Deleuze (1997) describes Spinoza’s *Ethics* as one of greatest books in the world, urging us to recognise its special qualities and read beyond its constrained mathematical proofs to a subterranean world of ‘fire’, which ‘is not what it first seems’ (Deleuze, 1997:20). Despite the ‘discontinuous, subterranean, volcanic’ (p.27) depths that Deleuze identifies, he is right to suggest that the initial encounter with the *Ethics* is somewhat different - it appears to be ‘rectilinear, continuous, serene, navigable’ (p.20). To convey the ideas in the *Ethics* Spinoza employs a structure based on Euclid’s geometrical method, a mathematical system of proofs, which consists of axioms, propositions, definitions and demonstrations. It is important to understand that Spinoza’s purpose in writing the *Ethics* was to challenge commonly held 17th century ideas about the nature of the universe, of God and humanity, which were drawn from Aristotelean metaphysics, religious scripture and Descartes’ philosophy of the mind (Curley, 1988; Lord, 2010). Spinoza sought to propose an entirely different order, and in attempting this, his ideas were not only unusual and difficult, but they were also radical and dangerous. It has been suggested that the impenetrability of the writing was, in part, a ‘tactical necessity’ for Spinoza whose ideas put him in great danger (Montag, 1999). However, it was also a project of reason. By beginning with sound definitions of terms (e.g. such as substance, attribute and God) and positioning mathematical proofs for his argument, Spinoza sought to demonstrate that the 17<sup>th</sup> century world-view was flawed and illogical. He

wanted readers to follow the logical lines of his argument and, through the ‘power of knowing’ (Deleuze, 1988:84), come to understand the true nature of the universe.

Deleuze (1988) suggests that a double reading of the *Ethics* is possible - a systematic mathematic revelation of the whole and, simultaneously, an affective understanding, a ‘meeting of concept and affect’ (p.130), which is achieved through the ‘celestial and subterranean’ (p.130) movements of the text. This subterranean, ‘other *Ethics*’ (Montag, 1999:26), is expressed through the prefaces, appendices and the scholia. The scholia are Spinoza’s important explanatory notes, which ‘intersect and reintersect’ (Deleuze, 1997:27) with the ‘grandiose river’ (p.27) of the main argument, allowing for both a conceptual and affective reading of the text. Deleuze writes,

[e]ach scolium is like a lighthouse that exchanges its signals with the others, at a distance and across the flow of the demonstrations. It is like a language of fire that is distinguishable from the language of the waters’ (p.27).

According to Deleuze any reading of Spinoza is, necessarily, non-linear. We cannot begin at the beginning, even if that is where Spinoza himself appears to set out - because there is no beginning. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza’s geometrical method begins with a first principle and follows on from there, unfolding. And yet, we always already find ourselves in the middle of the ‘common plane of immanence’ (Deleuze, 1988:122), which implies a kinetic and dynamic ‘way of life’ (p.122) rather than a philosophical method. As we will see, such life is a complex interrelation of bodies with variant degrees of velocity. Thus, there is no beginning, ‘one slips in, enters in the middle; one takes up or lays down rhythms’ (p.123). I do not intend to give a full account of Spinoza’s metaphysics here but, inspired by this Deleuzean interpretation, I will take up the rhythm that I find in Spinoza and think with it, to generate new ideas around the emergent Co-operative schools project.

## **4.2 Spinoza’s Ethics: a metaphysical foundation**

### **Spinoza’s universe – radical monism**

Spinoza’s project is concerned with political power (Balibar, 1998). He explores how power is formed, how it ebbs and flows through causal relations, expressing itself in a complex network of active and passive interactions. Ultimately, he seeks to demonstrate how the human power to act is grounded in the dynamism of the universe and increases through active co-operation with others. However, before he can make these claims, he must cast aside prevailing beliefs about the nature of the universe, of God, of transcendence and causality (Curley, 1988). In the earliest phase of his argument, Spinoza reveals the ontological

foundations of his philosophy, '[e]xcept God, no substance can be or be conceived' (EIP14). This is Spinoza's 'radical monism' (Williams, 2007:352), the claim that all being is one, there is only one being, and that being is God. In a direct challenge to Descartes's dualism, Spinoza sets out to prove that there is only one substance, 'God, or Nature' (*Deus sive Natura*), which expresses infinite attributes. Williams suggests that this rich 'knot' (p.20), which emphasises unity rather than dualism, is the foundation of Spinoza's project and the site of possibility for his claims about causality and power.

Here it will be useful to spend a little effort trying to picture the universe as Spinoza sees it. We need to understand how everything is connected, so that we can grasp the monist claim that 'being is one' and, later, come to understand how this idea powers the ethics and politics of Spinoza's philosophy. Spinoza positions God, or Nature as the one, indivisible substance of the universe (EIP14). The essence of this substance is expressed through its infinite attributes (EIP11), and it is through the attributes that we come to know and understand anything about God, and thus about the nature of reality. Attributes are the 'dynamic and active' (Deleuze, 1990:45) expressions of the infinite universe, only partially glimpsed by the human mind as the universal laws of logic (thought) and motion (extension). These are but two of the infinite ways of being. Thought is expressed, through the infinite intellect, as the infinite continuum of thinking. Extension is expressed, through the infinite physicality, as the infinite continuum of motion and rest (Lord, 2010:41). When Spinoza argues that everything that is, is 'in God' (EIP15) he means that 'God is in the world, the world is in God' (Deleuze, 1978:1). He is suggesting that all the seemingly individual thoughts, ideas, objects and bodies, which we encounter in our existence are, in fact, finite 'modes' of this one infinite substance, temporarily popping up on this active plane of being, as dynamic expressions of the infinite universe. Deleuze calls this 'univocal being' (Deleuze, 1978:1), and suggests that in the first book of Spinoza's *Ethics* we learn that '[t]he absolutely infinite substance is Being as Being' (Deleuze, 1978:1).

### **Immanent causality - autonomy, freedom and power**

Spinoza's next move is to abandon the idea of transcendent power. He writes, 'God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things' (EIP18), thereby denying the transcendental power of God as 'creator' and positioning an immanent power of actualisation, which is both the cause and effect of itself. By positioning God, or Nature, as the self-actualising 'free-cause' (EIP17C2) Spinoza demonstrates his doctrine of immanent causality - a power of being, which is neither dependent upon nor determined by any other, but is the power of being itself. It is through this crucial manoeuvre that we witness the 'fall of metaphysical

hierarchy' (Sharp and Smith, 2012:1). Thus, we learn that Spinoza's God is not an external creator but, as nature, is the intrinsic power and 'principle of creation and becoming in the world' (Williams, 2006:20). Montag (1999) reminds us that if there is no transcendence then the question of power is paramount and Spinoza's doctrine of immanent causality becomes the theory of power in the universe - the active, creative power of cause (*potentia*), and the corresponding passivity of effect (*potestas*). These ideas of activity and passivity, of cause and effect are the vital rhythms of power in Spinoza's universe.

Unfolding from this self-actualising power of being Spinoza presents a logical scheme of causality, arguing that every 'thing' is determined and caused by another 'thing', which is, in turn, determined and caused by another 'thing', and so on, to infinity (E1P28). This is a non-linear process where interaction and complexity are not derivative outcomes but are always already occurring in every causal event (Balibar, 1997). For Spinoza, every 'thing' is a cause and necessarily produces effects. Therefore, to exist means to be in a causal relationship with other things, to act upon them and modify them - this action and modification goes on in a network of necessary and determined non-linear relations. Thus, we see that Spinoza's unfolding universe is fully determined, there is no contingency (EIP29) and things could be 'in no other way, and in no other order than they have been produced' (EIP33). The power of the universe is to actualise the universe as it necessarily unfolds, 'God's power is his essence itself' (EIP43).

Balibar (1997) draws our attention to the connection between the definition of causality in nature, and the definition of desire as the essence of Man. Spinoza writes, '[d]esire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to *do* something' (EIIID1). Here the essence of causality is the relationship of activity and passivity within the individual. This is a differential relationship, which defines an individual's essence and simultaneously puts it into affective relations with other individuals. Balibar identifies, in Spinoza's scheme of causality, a transindividual equivalence between 'the idea of each individual's actual existence, and the idea of multiple relationships (connections, chains)' (p.16). Thus, it is impossible to think of an individual without always thinking of it in a mesh of causal relationships with other individuals.

It will be helpful to pause here and consider the apparent tension between Spinoza's necessitarianism and the ideas of social change and educational transformation that are integral to this thesis. My research is concerned with processes of change and transformation in education and, specifically, with the potentiality of the Co-operative schools to offer an

alternative. This focus might seem to imply a kind of contingency that Spinoza denies, for example when he writes, ‘there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way’ (EIP29). Miller (2001) argues that a ‘coherent and sophisticated’ (p.779) notion of possibility is vital to the accomplishment of Spinoza’s project. In a short article entitled, *Spinoza’s Possibilities* he seeks to demonstrate how Spinoza is both ‘an advocate of universal necessity and a defender of non-existent possibles or particulars’ (2001:812). Miller’s interpretation follows Spinoza’s argument when he describes the actually existing world as necessary and singular. He explains that, ‘[n]othing that is a part of this world could not be not a part of it’ (p.811); and in reverse, ‘nothing that is not a part of this world could be a part of it’ (p.811). However, he argues, it does not follow that everything that can possibly exist does actually exist. He explains that there could be many things that are possible, according to the laws of nature, and yet do not exist, ‘because the causal order does not allow them to exist’ (p.812). In following Miller’s argument, I do not perceive Spinoza’s necessitarianism to be incompatible with the ideas of potential and possibility that I explore in the emerging Co-operative schools project.

### **Spinoza’s parallelism: the non-causal connection of mind and body**

Spinoza makes no distinction between mind and body. To explain this radical position, we must consider the idea of universal substance and remember that everything of substance is ‘in God’ (EIP15). Spinoza tells us that all ideas are expressions of the infinite intellect (EIIP1) and that all bodies are expressions of the infinite physicality (EIIP2). Thus God, as substance, is both thinking thing and extended being. As thinking thing, the infinite intellect necessarily comprehends its own essence - it has an idea of each of its infinite attributes and every one of its modes (EIIP3, EP4Dem). All thoughts and ideas are immanently caused by God, as thinking being, and expressed as the attribute of thought. Likewise, all bodies are immanently caused by God, as extended being, and expressed as the attribute of extension. In revealing thinking and extension as attributes of God, Spinoza makes it clear that mind and body are not distinct but are ‘one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension’ (EIIP2S, EIIP7S). This radical move is coined as Spinoza’s *parallelism*, whereby mind and body are the same being expressed, in parallel, as two different but contemporaneous *ways* of being (EIIP7S). To put this in Spinoza’s words, ‘the order and connection of ideas in the same as the order and connection of things’ (EIIP7). Contemporary thinkers are excited by the potential of this ‘novel doctrine’ (Deleuze, 1990:256), which allows Spinoza to ‘bring the body back in’

(Montag, 1999: xx) and pave the way for a profoundly new kind of ethics. Deleuze suggests that, '[t]he theory of power according to which actions and passions of the body accompany actions and passions of the soul amounts to an ethical vision of the world' (Deleuze, 1990:256). Before we turn our attention to this ethical potential we must understand how finite modes, which we recognise as individual bodies, 'pop up' and are distinguishable from one another through processes of integration and individuation.

### **Integration as individuation: simple and complex bodies**

Spinoza tells us that every individual is a unity, a composition of parts, which integrate to form a whole (EIIPost1). Balibar (1997) attends to this notion of integration in order to think through the possibilities of Spinoza's collective individualism and, in so doing, reveals the contemporary relevance of this philosophy to the task of theorising the affective reality of democratic and co-operative communities. For Spinoza integration is a *process* of continual individuation - an individual always integrates other, simpler individuals and is itself integrated into other, more complex forms. This individualizing process of integration and disintegration, of composition and decomposition crucially depends upon the universal laws of motion and rest. An individual body can integrate and achieve stability only insofar as a constant proportion of motion and rest maintains (EIIIL7). This means that for any individual to maintain itself, as itself, there must be a constant proportion of variation and sameness - without it, the individual, as that individual, is lost. Thus, in order for an individual to retain itself it must be involved in the 'continuous regeneration' of its constituent parts' (p.18) via an ongoing process of exchange and renewal. Balibar identifies the transindividual implication of this theory, observing that every individual needs other individuals with which to make exchanges and regenerate. Spinoza writes, '[t]he human body, to be preserved, requires a great many other bodies, by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated' (EIIPost.4). Therefore, as exchanges happen between individuals, there is a continual flow of abandonment and incorporation, of loss and gain. To preserve oneself there must be a constant proportion which remains invariant - this can be understood as *conatus* - all individuals seek to maintain this constant though the dynamic process of exchange, which necessarily involves both composition and decomposition. Balibar writes, 'the complete concept of an individual is that of an equilibrium which is not fixed, but

dynamic - a metastable equilibrium which must be destroyed if it is not continually recreated' (Balibar, 1997:22).

### 4.3 The collective individual and co-operative power

#### Spinoza's striving *conatus*

The idea of the *conatus* is central to the *Ethics* and, although it is not wholly original,<sup>3</sup> Spinoza develops it as a 'radically new ethical concept' (Lloyd, 1996:9) through which his project expands into the realms of politics and ethics. It is through the *conatus* that Spinoza accounts for the expression of immanent power in the universe, a power that is expressed through the *conatus* of every being. *Conatus* is the effort or 'power' (Deleuze, 1988:97) of a thing to persist in its own being. It is the 'striving' (Curley, 1988), which each individual undertakes to increase its power and maintain itself. Connected to the laws of motion and rest, it is the way in which an individual responds and adapts, as cause and effect, through the rhythms of activity and passivity in the universe. This process of self-preservation can be understood as a 'strategy' of action (Bove, 1996), through which an individual *conatus* defends against encounters that might diminish its power and seeks associations that will augment it. Thus, we see the co-operative nature of Spinoza's *conatus*. In order to increase its power of acting the *conatus* engages in multiple relationships, seeking out useful resources with which to mix and mingle, integrate and exchange.

Spinoza writes that *conatus* is 'the very essence of man' (EIIIP9S). He describes how this essential striving is a 'will' to persevere, which manifests unconsciously as 'appetite' and consciously as 'desire' (EIIIP9S). Balibar (1997) explains how the distinction between conscious and unconscious striving is significant because it transforms our understanding of humanity's essence in general (appetite), to an individual's essence in particular (desire). Balibar observes that, through Spinoza's theory of affects, essence is transformed from a metaphysical notion, which unifies humankind, to an ethical one, which determines and differentiates individuals.

#### Mind as the idea of the body – the relationship of imagination and reason

In order to propel itself through life the *conatus* draws upon and maximises all available resources, including those of body and mind. Spinoza's theory attends to the way in which

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<sup>3</sup> Initially coined by the Stoics (Wolfson, 1934 via Lloyd, 1996), and present in the work of Spinoza's contemporaries Descartes, Hobbes (Curley, 1988) and Leibniz (Deleuze, 1990).

the power of the *conatus* flows through body and mind as both passion and emotion, imagination and reason.

For Spinoza, mind and body are not separate substances, nor are the body and its passionate affects inferior to the mind and its rational processes. Spinoza's parallelism insists that the mind and body are intrinsically related expressions of the same human individual and he argues that 'the idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind's power of thinking' (EIIIPXI). To give a full account of the dynamic power of the *conatus*, Spinoza's analysis explores the way in which reason and imagination come together in the human body and mind as active and passive forces.

Spinoza offers his theory of affects as a critical response to the Cartesian idea that humans operate outside of nature, as 'a dominion within a dominion' (EIIIPref, EIV P4), exercising absolute power over their passions. It is also a response to Hobbes who, in contrast, concludes that 'the passions of men are commonly more potent than their reason' (Hobbes, 1998:19,4) - a thesis that has bleak prospects for social harmony. Spinoza seeks to demonstrate another possibility, one in which the individual and the collective might come together. He maintains that humans are a part of the universe and are subject to the 'universal laws and rules of Nature' (EIIIPref). The certainty regarding causality and the human place in the universe, which is 'everywhere one and the same' (EIIIPref), serves as a liberating intelligence for Spinoza, enabling rational knowledge of the passions and a deep understanding of human nature. Through this project of rational understanding, Spinoza seeks to overcome both Cartesian dualism and the Hobbesian problem of society. He argues that humans are not different from nature but are a part of it and he urges his readers to apply the same analytical tools that illuminate the scientific principles of the universe. He writes, 'I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes and bodies' (EIIIPref). By providing a detailed account of the 'nature and powers of the affects' (EIIIPref) Spinoza believes that he will be able to show what 'the mind can do to moderate them' (EIIIPref).

Montag (1999) explains how Spinoza's engagement with the body and its affects allows for an opening beyond mere consciousness, towards an understanding of causal connections, and thus towards the possibility of political agency,

[t]o bring the body back in is to awaken from the slumber of consciousness, from the political somnambulism of individuals dreaming they are masters of their own fate,



unaware of the forces that determine their actions and therefore unable to change them (p. xx)

Despite this possibility, it is important to remember that the body remains a site of constant variation and vitality, which can never be wholly grasped by the mind (EIIIP2). Spinoza reminds us that, ‘no one has yet determined what the body can do ... the body itself, simply from the laws of its own nature, can do many things which its mind wonders at’ (EIIIP2S). Deleuze (1990) rephrases Spinoza when he writes, ‘*we do not even know of what affections we are capable, nor the extent of our power*’ (p.226). He suggests that this is Spinoza’s ‘war cry’ (1990:255) and the basis of the ethical question: ‘what can a body do?’ (pp.217-234). This important question shapes my research project and is key to the Spinozist framework that I use to interpret and analyse the emerging Co-operative schools project (see below).

The connection between mind and body is central to Spinoza’s project and when Deleuze (1997) tells us that, in Spinoza, ‘everything is light’ (p.23) he is using the metaphor of illumination to explain how this connection manifests. He writes,

Effects or signs are shadows that play on the surface of bodies, always between two bodies. The shadow is always on the border. It is always a body that casts a shadow on another. We know bodies only through the shadow they cast upon us, and it is through our own shadow that we know ourselves, ourselves and our bodies. Signs are effects of light in a space filled with things colliding into each other at random ... Chiaroscuro is in itself an effect of the brightening or darkening of the shadow: it is the variations of power or vectorial signs that constitute degrees of chiaroscuro, the augmentation of power being a brightening, the diminution of power a darkening (p.23).

Spinoza argues that we always begin with the partial and subjective knowledge of affect, which is located in and transmitted via our bodies. Through processes of reflection and communication, we move towards objective and conceptual ‘common notions’, which are universally understood and shared, finally working towards a more perfect and intuitive grasp of the universe. Spinoza suggests that these three ways of knowing ‘affect’, ‘notion’ and ‘essence’, are necessarily related and interdependent.

Deleuze (1997) extends the light metaphor to discuss the second way of knowing where ‘light is no longer reflected or absorbed by bodies that produce shadows; it makes bodies transparent by revealing their intimate ‘structure’ (*fabrica*)’ (p.23). Deleuze calls this intellectual knowing of the causes and structures an ‘optical geometry’ (p.23) and he contrasts it with the imaginative grasp of the shadows between bodies. Deleuze insists that we cannot dismiss affective knowledge, these ‘confused ideas of bodily mixtures’ (p.25) and ‘delirious

interpretations' (p.25) 'serve as a springboard' to the vitality and power which enables us to form 'common notions' or concepts. He suggests that affective knowledge lights the way to this second form of knowledge by going through processes of 'selection' and 'passional struggle' (p.25).

### **Imagination and affects – sadness, joy and desire.**

In Book III of the *Ethics* Spinoza enters the realm of psychology as he seeks to describe the emotional landscape of the human being – he wants to show how we come to be affected and how we are determined by these experiences. At the beginning of this section he identifies three affects, 'sadness', 'joy' and 'desire', and he suggests that all emotions are expressions of these fundamental states. He explains that, 'desire is man's very essence' (EIIID1) and he observes how our 'strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions' (EIIID1Exp.) drive us and propel us through life. He suggests that as we respond to this striving, we operate with greater and lesser consciousness, and therefore increase or diminish our capacity for joy and sadness. For Spinoza, joy is the 'passage from a lesser to a greater perfection' (EIIID2) and sadness is its opposite. By 'perfection' Spinoza means consciousness and awareness, he refers to our active engagement with (rather than our passive experience of) our universe. As our power of acting is increased so we experience greater joy, as our power of acting is decreased so we experience greater sadness.

Spinoza goes on to provide a detailed account of the human emotions, including 'love', 'disdain', 'scorn', 'pity' and other 'vacillations of the mind' (EDefAffXLVIIIExp) with the purpose of showing how these relate to the primary affects of 'sadness', 'joy' and 'desire'. Whilst this is a comprehensive account, I am principally concerned with the description of 'hope', 'fear' and 'confidence' as I interpret and analyse the emergence of the Co-operative schools project. Spinoza writes that 'hope is an inconstant joy' (EDefAffXII), which arises from an idea of a future or past thing the outcome of which is in doubt and that 'fear is an inconstant sadness' (EDefAffXIII), which arises from an idea of a future or past thing the outcome of which is in doubt. So, using this analysis both hope and resistance become non-affirmative states. In contrast, Spinoza tells us that 'confidence is a joy born of the idea of a future or past thing concerning which the cause of doubting has been removed' (EDefAffXVExp.). Thus, hope and resistance are non-affirmative states, while confidence and a strategy of action to augment power are the means of affirmation.

Particularly significant to our understanding of how humans form relations of sociability, and co-operation, is Spinoza's doctrine of the imitation of the affects, whereby we recognise

ourselves in others and are consequently moved to a variety of possible feelings. This is a ‘mimetic’ (Balibar, 1997) process, which spreads from individual to individual through partial causes, vacillations of conflict and harmony, and oscillations of joy and sadness. Spinoza writes, ‘[i]f we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect’ (EIIIP27). This is the moment whereby, though processes of ‘identification, projection and introjection’ (Montag, 1998: xviii), we recognise ourselves in others and are consequently moved to a variety of possible feelings - compassion, kindness, envy, ambition. Spinoza suggests that whilst this gives an account of human compassion, which gives rise to benevolence (EIIIP27C3D), it is a ‘two-edged sword’ (Curley, 1988:119) because it can also be the source of emulation (EIIIP27S), the desire to have that which others like us have, giving rise to ambition (EIIIP29S) and to envy (EIIIP32S). So it is that, ‘from the same property of human nature from which it follows that men are compassionate, it also follows that the same men are envious and ambitious’ (EIIIP32S). Balibar (1997) explains how, through this process, the relationship to others ‘emerges as a double process of identification’ (p.27). That is, we identify ourselves with others because we recognise a similarity between ourselves and we project ourselves upon them, Balibar calls this a ‘continuous communication’ (p.27) of affects which circulate between individuals reinforcing collective and personal identities in a ‘Janus-faced’ (p.27) process. By attending to these fundamental principles of human nature Spinoza seeks to illuminate ‘both the tendencies to discord which make the state necessary, and the tendencies to harmony which make it possible’ (Curley, 1988:119). This opening and closing between affective forces is crucial for co-operation and the possibility of reaching or maintaining a ‘state of equilibrium’ (EIIIP32S), it points to the necessarily dynamic nature of co-operative relationships, and the fluctuating human tendencies that make co-operation both necessary and possible.

### **Reason – common notions as adequate ideas**

Spinoza’s theory points to the role of reciprocity and communication in the development of knowledge. Balibar explains that relationships between individuals contribute to the formation of adequate ideas, which are ‘conceived in the same way in different minds’ (Balibar, 1997:29) and these lead to a greater degree of activity and a lesser degree of passivity. Because they are ‘common notions’, that is – shared ideas, they also work to create a ‘partial identity’ between different individuals, which we might call a community.

Spinoza describes how knowledge is founded on ‘common notions’, which are universally understood and shared ideas. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) explain that common notions are

‘crucial to the preservation of the individual, and to the formation of reasonable relations between individuals’ (p.104). As an individual *conatus* works to preserve itself, it develops the capacity for reason and gathers these ‘common notions’ to form a structure of knowledge through which it comes to know the universe and achieve its ‘proper good’ (Balibar, 1997:28). Spinoza writes,

Since reason demands nothing contrary to Nature, it demands that everyone love himself, seek his own advantage, what is really useful to him, want what will really lead a man to greater perfection, and absolutely, that everyone should strive to preserve his own being as far as he can (EIVP18S)

Balibar alights on this notion of usefulness to reveal the transindividuality of reason. He explains how Spinoza’s reason is utilitarian in two ways: firstly, each individual must know and seek what is useful for himself in order to preserve his own existence and secondly that this relies upon relationship and reciprocity between individuals.

### **Co-operative power – imagination, reason and virtue**

The above analysis reveals how unconscious appetites of imagination and the conscious desires of reason flow through the *conatus* as it seeks to preserve its own being. This link between imagination and reason is a significant move in Spinoza’s ethical project because in understanding the self-preservation of the *conatus* as a rational endeavour it becomes a virtuous process (Lloyd, 1996). Spinoza understands reason and virtue as the same thing and writes, ‘it is clear that we neither strive for nor will, neither want, nor desire because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it.’ (EIIIP9S). The striving to persevere is the thing and, at once, it becomes both the starting point and the end of virtue, the good in itself. Spinoza writes in Book IV, ‘the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one’s own being, and that happiness consists in a man’s being able to preserve his being’ (EIVP18S). Thus, there is no conflict between self-seeking and altruism because self-preservation is the good in itself, the foundation of virtue, and the way to harmonious living (Lloyd, 1996). In a clear depiction of *conatus* as a *co-operative power*, Spinoza explains how we must look ‘outside ourselves to preserve our being’ (EIVP18S). He describes how, in joining with others, we increase our power to act:

[For] if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more powerful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were one mind and one body; that

all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all (EIVP18S)

Whilst the *conatus* is ‘individual self-maintenance’ (Hampshire, 1951:78) it is also the way in which the particular participates in the universal, so that ‘by preserving oneself one contributes to the preservation of the entire universe of which we are all an infinitesimal part’ (Mack, 2010:8).

Spinoza tells us that the imagination is a passive realm in which individuals are occupied by inadequate ideas and subject to multiple affects, and that the rational mind is an active realm in which individuals are in possession of adequate knowledge and have freedom from the passions (Balibar, 1997). The point is not to give primacy to either one of these realms but to understand the continual play of activity and passivity that persists within every moment. As the striving *conatus* negotiates this terrain, both within itself and along with others, it encounters a range of ideas and affects that serve to increase and diminish its power to act. This theory offers an analysis of human affects and an explanation of how these work to empower and disempower the striving *conatus*. Spinoza observes that as the *conatus* engages in multiple affective encounters, such as love and hate or hope and fear, it operates with greater and lesser consciousness and increases or diminishes its capacity for joy and sadness. For Spinoza, joy is the ‘passage from a lesser to a greater perfection’ (EIIIDefAff) and sadness is its opposite. As our conscious power of acting is increased we experience greater joy, as our conscious power of acting is decreased we experience greater sadness. Thus, there is a connection between the striving power of the *conatus* and the passions, which directly relate to the conative power to act. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) explain how this opens out to the political realm,

These dynamic relations between human individuals – Spinoza’s version of sociability – inevitably involve negative as well as positive emotions: hate as well as love and civic friendship. The idea of antagonism is essential in Spinoza’s understanding of the political; for the power of the multitude is power of discord as well as power of concord. Hate is here a form of social bond – a form of sociability. But this antagonism is not a relation of simple opposition between individual and State. The dominant and the dominated – sovereign and citizens – are equally part of ‘the multitude’. The unavoidable partiality of similitude makes ambivalence and vacillation an inextricable part of politics (pp.67-68).

In the *Ethics* Spinoza describes what it means to live a good life and how to become the best possible version of ourselves. In giving an account of being, ideas and the universe, he describes the virtuous life and sets out a method for its achievement. According to Spinoza, the truly wise man is ‘conscious of himself, and of God, and of things’ (EVP42S) and this

consciousness of the universe and subsequent self-possession leads towards ‘true peace of mind’ (EVP42S). Spinoza’s method involves cutting through the superstition of religion and the dogma of inherited belief systems and demands a truthful encounter with the nature of reality. Deleuze explains that Spinoza’s intention is not to reveal knowledge but to comprehend our own ‘power of knowing’ (Deleuze, 1988:84) and that virtuous life involves becoming conscious of this power. In this sense, Spinoza merely encourages us to think – it is a philosophy of consciousness and thinking. In the final passage of the *Ethics* Spinoza acknowledges that although the way may be hard, it is possible, and it is this sense of possibility that I hold on to as I begin to develop the tools to analyse and interpret the Co-operative schools project.

## 4.4 Thinking with Spinoza in the present moment

### Transindividuality: beyond liberalism and communitarianism

Hampshire (1951) observes that Spinoza’s extraordinary originality opens towards multiple interpretations and he draws attention to the ‘curious double history’ (p.27) of Spinoza’s thought, which, he says, ‘has been an inspiration to two types of mind, and has been interpreted in two traditions’ (p.27). As I begin to apply Spinoza’s 17<sup>th</sup> century ideas to the contemporary political moment, it is necessary to discuss some of the challenges that are present in the literature. A significant tension arises between the schools of communitarianism and liberalism, with the former suggesting that Spinoza’s philosophy is ‘holistic’ (Sacksteder, 1985:398) and the latter that it is ‘radically individualistic’ (Rice, 1990:274).

Rice (1990) argues that it is ‘wholly erroneous’ (p.271) to extend Spinoza’s theory of the individuation of bodies in the *Ethics* to the political realm (as I intend to do). He suggests that the representation of the ‘body politic’ (Balibar, 1998:64) as ‘quasi-living organism’ (Rice, 1990:271), and thus as an individual, is a misrepresentation based on a communitarian understanding of Spinoza. Rice cites Matheron (1969), Sacksteder (1980) and Zac (1963) as examples of the communitarian and ‘literalist’ readings that he seeks to reject. Rice assumes a liberal position and prefers the ‘metaphorical’ readings offered by Den Uyl (1983) and McShea (1969), whose arguments I will briefly outline. Each of these political philosophers position Spinoza’s theory as antecedent to the school of liberalism, which they defend. As a result of this positioning they are significantly invested in the idea of the ‘atomistic notion of the individual’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999:121) and the idea of the political state as an individual or ‘superindividual’ is impossible. McShea views the state only as a mechanism for

the organisation and distribution of the power of individuals (1969:141–2). Den Uyl also rejects the idea of constitutive power, arguing that Spinoza is a ‘methodological individualist’ (1983:67) whose account of the society is merely the relationships and activities of individual actors. He argues that, ‘Spinoza does not think of social unity as something organic, but simply as the effective organisation of individual powers’ (1983:67).

Gatens and Lloyd (1999) dismiss the distinction that Rice seeks to draw between ‘literal’ and ‘metaphorical’ interpretations of the state as an individual, arguing that that the ‘truth value of fictions and metaphors’ (p.122) is more complex than Rice suggests. Their analysis shows that an idea of identity can be the construction of the imagination without being ‘false’. They propose that Spinoza’s reciprocal account of imagination and reason, which I have discussed above, means that the imagination works to create ‘collective ‘illusions’, which have ‘real’ effects’ (p.123). That is, shared ideas of cohesion and belonging ‘which serve to structure forms of identity, social meaning and value, but which considered in themselves, are neither true or false’ (p.123). This idea is also expanded by James (2010) who studies the role of narrative in Spinoza’s theory, interpreting it as a function of imagination and, therefore, as an important resource for the *conatus*. James argues that Spinoza’s political project is concerned with how individuals become motivated to engage with co-operative forms of life, despite the significant tensions that exist, both within and between themselves and also with regard to other possible models of organisation. She argues that Spinoza’s imaginative thinking is a form of narrativizing, which allows individuals to overcome the inevitable conflicts and disagreements (EIVP32) and progress towards harmonious collective organisation. James argues that communities construct narratives in order achieve their shared goals, suggesting that these ground understanding of how to proceed by offering ‘conceptions of co-operative ways of life’, which shape ‘our willingness (or lack of willingness) to live by them’ (p.254). James is at pains to note that whilst the imagination can act as ‘a potent unifying force’ (p.257), it can also work to undermine co-operation in cases, for example, where ‘a community bases its efforts to co-operate on a narrative that significantly overestimates its capacities’ (p.257). These ideas about ‘collective illusion’, the role of narrative, and its limitations, will be important to my analysis of the vision of the Co-operative schools project in Chapters 6 and 7.

Gatens and Lloyd (1999) are also critical of the way in which Rice’s critique rehearses old debates between communitarian and liberal traditions, which, they suggest, are not relevant to Spinoza’s philosophy. I am persuaded by this argument, which in keeping with Balibar’s reading of Spinoza, denies that there is a fundamental antagonism between the powers of the

individual and embodied power of the collective. In *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present* (1999) Gatens and Lloyd demonstrate how Spinoza offers an ‘arrestingly fertile’ resource with which to ‘dissolve’ the ‘false opposition’ (p.132) between liberalism and communitarianism and rethink a range of contemporary issues with an emphasis upon reciprocity and connection rather than separation and opposition. Crucially, they understand Balibar’s transindividual reading of Spinoza’s collective individualism as an ‘attempt to think unity and multiplicity as reciprocal rather than opposed viewpoints’ (p.126). In this reading, the individual and the collective are inseparable, and it is through the Spinozist idea of transindividuality that we see individuals as necessarily and continually connected and reciprocal. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) argue that Spinoza inspires a different way of thinking through the richness and complexity of social and political issues,

[f]rom a Spinozistic perspective neither liberalism nor communitarianism *alone* is capable of accounting for the complicated relations between individuals and the communities in which they dwell. Aspects of both approaches are necessary in order to retain the rich complexity of human life expressed through a multiplicity of ethical, social and political relations. The problem with the liberal/communitarian debate is that it rigidly opposes worthwhile insights from each approach, when such insights should be combined. (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999:133)

This is an exciting, and potentially, productive interpretation of Spinoza’s theory, which opens beyond a mere ‘double aspect’ (Hampshire, 1951:27) onto an expansive transindividual plane. Thus, it becomes possible to think beyond the constraining binaries of the neoliberal moment, for instance, private/public, competition/co-operation, individual/co-operative. I propose that Spinoza’s transindividual theory of *co-operative power* offers a different way of understanding these dilemmas and, in particular, offers a unique method of analysis and interpretation with which to explore the emerging Co-operative schools project.

### **Developing a methodology for research and analysis**

In the *Ethics* Spinoza offers a unique conception of power, which is relational. It is not a power of dominance or hierarchy but one that comes from joining with others. Spinoza understands this power through the concept of the *conatus*, which is the striving that being undertakes to persist in being. It is an energy, a force, a persistence - and it can increase and decrease in capacity. All beings strive to increase their power of acting and undertake various strategies to ensure their continued existence. Spinoza’s fundamental position is that everything is connected, that the boundaries between individuals are not distinct and that in order to maintain ourselves, and increase our power of acting, we draw upon multiple



resources - mixing, integrating and withdrawing. I argue that Spinoza offers an ontology of co-operation through this unique conceptualisation of transindividual *co-operative power*.

In turning to Spinoza's theory as a lens through which I might analyse and interpret the transforming education landscape and the Co-operative movement's expansion into the schools sector, I choose to focus on this concept of *co-operative power*. Williams (2006) positions Spinoza as a 'political realist' (p.24) who, in working with the idea of *potentia* as an active constitutive power, is not concerned with 'the conditions of legitimacy' (p.24) regarding the emerging state but rather with 'the complex production and reproduction of power that ceaselessly modifies the political terrain' (p.24). This distinction is particularly useful as I think about how to apply this theory to the emerging Co-operative academy schools – whilst the wider Co-operative project was positioned as a 'resistance' to academisation, the schools that pursued academy status were, arguably, more inspired by the potential for 'alternative' within the model. Does the idea of *potentia* offer any scope for expressing the standard academy structure otherwise? What does a Co-operative academy do to express its *co-operative power*? How far and to what extent are the Co-operative 'converter' academies empowered, or disempowered, to proceed with the vision of the Co-operative schools project? What energy and resources have there been for them to undertake this transformation? In developing my interpretation and analysis I found myself rephrasing Deleuze's important question 'what can a body do?' (Deleuze, 1990:217). I wanted to know what these bodies, which are schools, could do. I found myself asking what can these bodies, which are schools, enable those who constitute these bodies to do?

My engagement with the *Ethics* leads me to position the collective-individual of the Co-operative schools project and, by extension, the collective-individual of the three case studies presented in this thesis: the Co-operative College, Steepston Academy and Shorebank Academy. By interpreting each case study as an individual - that is, as a complex 'body politic' (Balibar, 1998:64) an 'individual of individuals' (p.64) – I am able to explore *how* these organisations are constituted according to Spinoza's ideas of activity and passivity. In each case, my analysis will attend to *how* the organisation 'tries to preserve its own form, how it is composed according to relations of agreement and disagreement or of activity and passivity' (Balibar, 1997:227). Thus, I will focus on the *conatus* of the Co-operative College (in Chapter 6) and the *conatus* of Steepston Academy and Shorebank Academy (in Chapter 7).

By the positioning the *conatus* of the Co-operative College and the *conatus* of Steepston Academy and Shorebank Academy, I am drawing upon Spinoza's idea of the transindividual,

which invites a consideration of the *conatus* across multiple scales, from individual participants, to the organisations which they belong, and to the Co-operative schools project which they are connected to. Spinoza's theory points us towards the transindividual nature of being, thus the *conatus* is, at once, individual and social – I suggest that it is impossible to discuss the individual except as also part of the social or the institutional. Therefore, in the analysis that follows in Chapters 6 and 7 the *conatus* is operational across the planes of the individual, the organisational and the project. There is an affective and intuitive knowledge beneath and above the scale of the individual whereby the *conatus* operates almost as a mediator (or amplifier) between the affective level of the individual and the collective level of transindividual. Thus, whilst the *conatus* is itself associated with the scale of the individual, it links the multiple scales of the transindividual.

Deleuze (1988) offers a helpful framework for approaching the question of the *co-operative power* within the Co-operative schools project. He suggests that three practical problems arise for the striving *conatus*: 1) how to maximise joyful passions (when there is constant vulnerability to sad passions) 2) how to form adequate ideas (when there is constant exposure to inadequate ideas) and 3) how to become conscious of causal connections to the 'oneness' (p.28) of the universe (when consciousness seems so illusory). Deleuze reminds us that these problems are constant and involve the *conatus* in continual processes of speculation, experiment and reflection – it follows, therefore, that any inquiry into these processes will be similarly speculative, experimental and reflective. The transindividual nature of the *conatus* means that a fixed schema of analysis is impossible. Instead, my analysis will be guided by the 'practical problems' that Deleuze identifies (above) and, as I track the *conatus* within the case studies of the Co-operative schools project, I will attend to the increases and decreases of power, to the strategies of activity and to the responses of passivity. This analysis is underpinned by Spinoza's theory of the affects, particularly by the idea of joyful and sad passions, and the role of reason and imagination in creating these. In order to further understand the expression of *co-operative power* within the Co-operative schools project I will draw upon contemporary Spinozist scholarship to explore the important role of narrative (James, 2010), the necessity of common notions (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999) and the vital significance of pedagogy (O'Donnell, 2017; Rovere, 2017).

## Conclusion

The Co-operative schools project is an experimental initiative, which positions a joyful vision of Co-operative schooling. Throughout my research, the task has been to understand what

that vision *is* and to explore *how* it is translated to and interpreted by the schools' sector. The application of Spinoza's theory of *co-operative power* to the Co-operative schools project requires a great deal of development and translation. This research project, through its close engagement with the political and pedagogical context, represents the beginnings of a conversation between theory and data. Deleuze writes, '[t]he entire *Ethics* is a voyage in immanence; but immanence is the unconscious itself, and the conquest of the unconscious. Ethical joy is the correlate of speculative affirmation' (p.29). This metaphor of the voyage is helpful as I apply the ideas of the *Ethics* to the realities of school transformation and consider the possibilities of co-operative pedagogy in the contemporary moment. A voyage is suggestive of adventure and discovery, and this is the spirit with which I approach this research project and the nature of the transindividual, *co-operative power* that I find in the *Ethics*. Deleuze suggests that Spinoza offers 'a philosophy of "life"' (p.26), and, as life, it is an active process of balancing and moderating between constantly shifting planes. Such that the coming together of 'speculative affirmation' (p.29) is always only a glimpse, a trace, which is, necessarily, experimental and creative.

My idea is that Spinoza offers a theoretical pathway beyond the binary thinking, which dogs attempts to think otherwise, and a way of making sense of *co-operative power*. Through my study and application of Spinoza's theory to the Co-operative schools project, I argue that it becomes a radical condition of possibility for interpreting and enabling the co-operative potential of the Co-operative 'converter' academy school. I argue that approaching the research from this Spinozist perspective allows for a productive examination of the Co-operative vision at the Co-operative College in Chapter 6 and of its interpretation at Steepston and Shorebank academies in Chapter 7. In each case, I consider the role of reason and imagination in producing and responding to the vision. In Chapter 8, I return to a theoretical discussion of transindividual *co-operative power* and I explore to what extent this way of being is possible in the context of the wider competitive system that is, perhaps, inhospitable to a co-operative imagination.

## Chapter 5. Research Design and Methods

*But as there is no such thing as an innocent reading, we must say what reading we are guilty of.*  
(Althusser, 1970:14)

*Right down at the factual base, the hard rock, insofar as there is any, of the whole enterprise, we are already explicating; and worse, explicating explications. Winks upon winks upon winks.*  
(Geertz, 1973:3)

This chapter describes the research project that evolved in response to the broad question: *What makes a school Co-operative?* In the account that follows, I outline the research process and detail the research tools that were used. I describe how my perspective developed in relation to changes and challenges ‘in the field’ and I explain how I connect these to Spinoza’s theory of *co-operative power*.

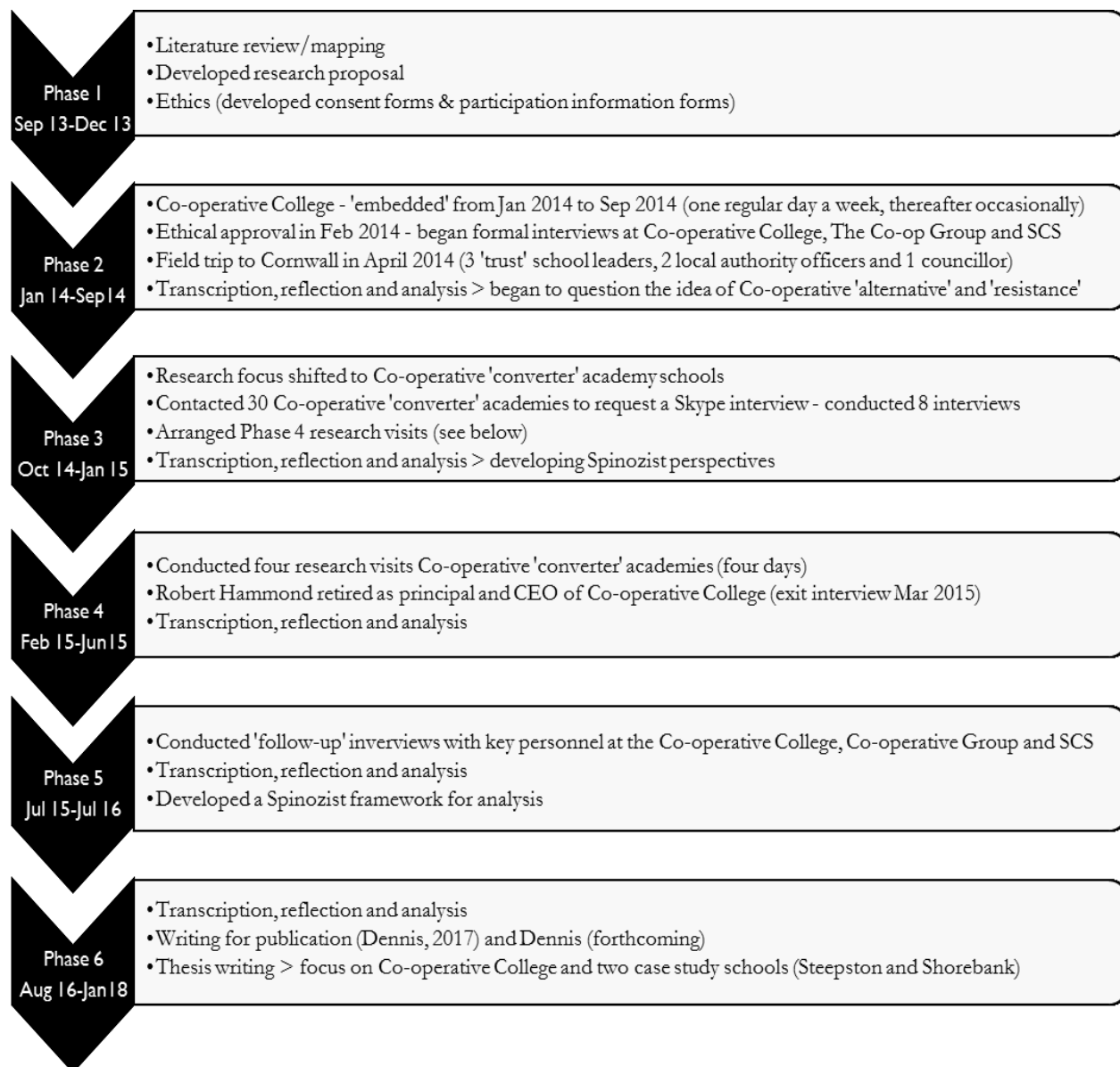
### 5.1 Overview of the research

I present this thesis as an ethnographic case study (Hancock and Algozzine, 2016) of the Co-operative schools project, a recent education initiative of the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College. The research was funded by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), in partnership with the Co-operative College. A programme of qualitative research was carried out, across multiple sites, between 2014–2016. The specifics of the funding partnership meant that I formed a close relationship with the Co-operative College, where my role was that of ‘embedded researcher’ (McGinity and Salokangas, 2014). Whilst this positioning offered a privileged perspective from which to explore the Co-operative schools project, including supported access to participating schools, and the opportunity to build relationships with the Schools Co-operative Society (SCS), it also introduced significant complexity in relation to my developing perspective and positionality. These issues are discussed below.

The research activity was exploratory and wide-ranging. This chapter describes how the project developed in relation to six phases of research, reflection and analysis. A diagram is provided (fig 5.1) to offer a schematic representation of the process. Data is drawn from the collection and analysis of various documents, and through processes of participant observation, focus groups and interviews – a table of all digitally recorded research interviews and focus groups is provided (tab 5.2). Throughout the research, and across all sites, I maintained detailed fieldnotes and kept a regular research journal to ensure a reflexive and evolving process of thinking and analysis. My research process has generated the data

that is represented here and I understand this process of representation as a form of analysis – therefore research data is used throughout the thesis and my ‘findings’ are not distinct from processes of thinking, writing, discussion and analysis.

An overview of key phases in the research process (fig. 5.1)



### Research questions

Over-arching question: What is a Co-operative school, what facilitates or inhibits co-operation and how do these factors relate?

**RQ1:** How does the Co-operative schools project position Co-operative schools as a mechanism for school transformation?

**RQ2:** How have stakeholders interpreted and engaged with the Co-operative schools project?

**RQ3:** How have national to local contextual factors influenced the development of the Co-operative schools project?

**RQ4:** How might Spinoza's theory of transindividual *co-operative power* be mobilised to rethink the potential of Co-operative schools?

## 5.2 The relationship between theory and method

This is a study of change and transformation. It investigates the Co-operative schools project as an initiative of the Co-operative College and the Co-operative Group. In Chapter 3, I described how these organisations responded to various legislative changes with ambitions to initiate a Co-operative transformation within the schools sector. Across the literature the 'Co-operative schools movement' is positioned as an 'alternative' and 'resistance' to the Academies programme (Thorpe, 2011, 2013), which is itself an orchestrated process of change and transformation (DFE, 2010). Thus, this topic is political - on a macro and micro scale - and, I suggest, viewing education as an applied politics allows for an analysis of the present moment through the lens of political philosophy. Throughout the research, I have used a concept of *co-operative power* that I find in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Madison (2012) suggests that 'theory is used in ethnography as an interpretive or analytical method' (p.14). I use the conceptual tools that I find in Spinoza's *Ethics* to examine the Co-operative schools project. This theory has enabled me to identify a number of issues and also, crucially, to explore ways of overcoming them.

Although Spinoza's theory has been rarely applied in scholarship on education (with very recent exceptions (Dahlbeck, 2017; de Freitas et al., 2017), there are specific reasons why this conceptual model appealed to me. I believe that Spinoza's theory enables an analysis that takes account of the complexity and dynamism of the changing political situation. As research progressed, the significance of wider contextual factors - specifically the neoliberal reforms of education and the Co-operative College's relationship to these - alerted me to the problems of positioning the Co-operative schools project in binary opposition to the Academies programme. Spinoza's theory enabled me to consider how the Co-operative 'converter' academy might be reframed, not as an 'alternative' or as a 'resistance' but rather, as a dynamic, constitutive power, allowing for a stronger conception of co-operative education.

Thomas (1993) writes that, '[t]he roots of critical thought spread from a long tradition of intellectual rebellion in which rigorous examination of ideas and discourse constituted political challenge' (p.18). In turning to Spinoza, a philosopher who thinks beyond the

dominant beliefs of his own time, I endeavour to add my voice to that ‘intellectual rebellion’ through this critical engagement with the Co-operative schools project. Thomas goes on to say that ‘[t]he act of critique implies that by thinking about and acting upon the world, we are able to change both our subjective interpretations and our objective conditions’ (p.18). This research project uses ethnographic modes of inquiry, in combination with an analysis rooted in the political philosophy of Spinoza, to explore the ideas and motivations of those who seek to establish alternatives but who may fall into the trap of thinking in binary terms. I do not seek to destabilise the efforts of those who are working to question the neoliberal marketisation of schools but rather to challenge those interpretations that work to reduce the *co-operative power* of Co-operative schools.

For Spinoza method is reflection, the idea of the idea. Method cannot precede the idea, it is discovered along the way; method does not produce or create knowledge but reflects and expresses it. As Deleuze (1988) observes we always begin in the middle with Spinoza, there is no starting point. Montag (1999) offers ‘*Homo Cogitat*’ (man thinks) as the ‘logical starting point of the Ethics’ (p.2), a proposition that does not appear until Book II. Thus, we see that thinking is always already underway. As it was with this research project. My first encounter with the Co-operative schools project came some time after its period of rapid growth and, I now realise, my own ethnographic work began long before I found myself ‘in the field’.

### 5.3 Getting started at the Co-operative College

In May 2013, I responded to this ‘call’ for research:

#### **PhD Studentship – What makes a school co-operative?**

The Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI) at Manchester Metropolitan University invites applications for a full-time PhD studentship ... The studentship, co-funded by MMU and the Co-operative College, ... will focus on the rapidly developing Co-operative schools movement. Currently there are just over 400 Co-operative schools in the UK with more on the way. The key question for the research is, ‘what makes a school co-operative?’ ... The studentship will work alongside a knowledge exchange project focusing on the development of a learning platform that will enable schools, communities and researchers to share their experience, ideas and practices. This may provide research access and contribute to the development of an evidence base for the research. The student will be expected to undertake case studies and surveys. (Studentship advert, May 2013) (Appendix B)

The idea for this doctoral project evolved through a series of conversations around the potential of the ‘rapidly developing Co-operative schools movement’. This dialogue formed part of a ‘knowledge-exchange project’ between MMU and the Co-operative College, which

was initiated by Professor of Education, John Schostak and the Principal and Chief Executive of the Co-operative College, Robert Hammond (pseudonyms have been used for all research participants, see below). This partnership formed to facilitate research into the emerging ‘Co-operative education sector’ (Facer et al., 2012) about which there was a sense of excitement, not only amongst co-operators and academics, but also in the national press (Mansell, 2011; Birch, 2012).

The announcement above represents my first encounter with the idea of the ‘Co-operative schools movement’, which, following the application and interview process, was to become my focus for the next few years. I include the advert here, at the beginning of this chapter on research design and methods, because I want to orient the reader to the start of that journey and show how the project evolved in response to the initial question ‘what makes a school co-operative?’ As I read the advert again, towards the end of the process, I understand how it contributed to my first impressions of the studentship - it offers a perspective, defines key relationships, and raises particular expectations. With the benefit of hindsight, I can see how these small pieces of information served to set me on my path and hinted at many of the opportunities and challenges that lay ahead.

A few weeks later I was invited to interview for the studentship at MMU’s Didsbury Campus. During the interview, I remember an almost overwhelming tone of optimism, which was set by the presence of Robert Hammond, Principal and CEO of the Co-operative College. The way he presented ‘the Co-operative schools movement’ was exciting and when I was offered the studentship later that day, I was pleased to accept it. On the train home, I reflected on aspects of the encounter and had some misgivings about what the research project might entail. That evening I sent an email to Professor John Schostak to discuss my initial thoughts,

*I have some concerns about being involved in a research project the outcomes of which are so already hoped for ... [W]hat happens if I find that the Co-operative school model doesn’t work for some groups in some situations? What if there is a disconnect between this model and the government agenda? What if the schools are not, in practice, enacting the Co-operative values or feel, too keenly, the contradictions that we know exist? We are talking about schools here – complex communities of people - I will, of course, find a lot of tensions ... will I be ‘allowed’ to explore them and present them properly in the research? It is very important to me that the project is real, that the research is genuine and that it makes a useful contribution to the literature. (Email from myself to John Schostak, 7th June 2013)*

Whilst the meeting itself had been inspiring, and I was delighted by the offer of the studentship, I did feel doubtful about some of the claims that had been made. As is heavily



implied in this email I also felt wary about the research partnership between the university and the Co-operative College. It seems that I anticipated some of the problems that were to come.

### **The role of ‘Embedded Researcher’**

My supervisory team at MMU used the term ‘embedded researcher’ to describe my relationship with the Co-operative College. McGinity and Salokangas (2014) offer the following definition of ‘embedded research’:

Embedded research describes a mutually beneficial relationship between academics and their host organizations whether they are public, private or third sector. The relationship typically provides the researcher with greater access to the host organization with benefits for collecting data and research funding. For the host organisation the relationship provides a bridge to academia and academic knowledge, networks and critical approaches to developing organizational policies. (p.3)

This arrangement meant that I would receive a bursary from MMU, and that I would be supported in the research by the Co-operative College. Whilst I was free to design my own research project, I was expected to generate empirical data and, as the advert suggests, ‘to undertake case studies and surveys’. I was handed a perspective, which was that the ‘Co-operative schools movement’ was setting out to transform education by offering a Co-operative alternative (to academisation) and a resistance to prevailing forces of privatisation, marketisation and competition. I accepted this perspective and, at the time, I felt excited by the possibilities.

During the first few months, from September 2013-December 2013 (Phase 1), I based myself at MMU where I spent time reviewing the literature, developing a research proposal and considering the ethical dimensions of the work ahead. From January 2014 – September 2014 (Phase 2), I began to spend one regular day a week at the Co-operative College and, whilst I was not a member of staff, I occupied a regular desk space and was included in life at the office. This was a rich period of research and field mapping, which provided foundations for the subsequent work. My positioning as ‘embedded researcher’ allowed me to develop a particular perspective on the organisation and strategies of the Co-operative schools project. I was granted significant access to information and introduced to a wide number of people who were involved with the initiative. As the research expanded, my connection to the Co-

operative College meant that I received a high level of engagement and commitment from the schools.

There is a nascent literature on embedded research (Duggan, 2014; McGinity and Salokangas, 2014; Rowley, 2014; Vindrola-Padros et al., 2017), which points to some of the issues that I encountered in this work, such as ‘positionality’ and ‘in-between-ness’ (Rowley, 2014). Rowley suggests that embedded research ‘sits across the insider-outsider binary’ (p.22) however, she notes that the “inbetweeness” of the space one operates within can also raise a number of issues’ (p.22). During her own experience of being ‘embedded’, she reports that she ‘sometimes felt like an outsider, at other times, an insider, while sometimes both or neither simultaneously’ (p.22). Rowley describes how this ‘constant shifting and flux was unsettling’ (p.22) and, similarly, Duggan (2014) came to see himself as an ‘orphan’ in the process.

The image of an ‘orphan’ ‘inbetween’ resonates with my experience of embedded research at the Co-operative College. The accounts offered by Duggan (2014) and Rowley (2014) each point to the same sense of dislocation and discomfit that I felt, and which seem to be an extension of the issues in traditional insider/outsider research (see Delamont, 2002). Griffith (1998) suggests that an ‘insider’ researcher is a member, or has prior knowledge of, the group being researched. I came to understand that the idea of ‘membership’ is crucial to the Co-operative movement and it engenders a strong ‘within the movement’ narrative – from the point of view of the Co-operative College I was always an ‘outsider’ because I had not spent my adult life working ‘within the movement’. At the commencement of the research, I was, technically, a ‘member’ of the Co-operative Bank but I did not feel any sense of ownership or belonging to the Co-operative movement. I had an unexamined attachment to the ‘values and principles’ and a broad sympathy with the aims of Co-operation. In contrast to this, I felt as an ‘insider’ in the field of education, specifically in terms of the secondary schools sector where I had considerable professional experience. This insider/outsider positionality, or ‘inbetweeness’, became quite complex for me and shifted several times over the course of the research. The ‘embedded’ nature of my work with the College, and the partnership with MMU, meant that the College felt a sense of ownership over my research – I was ‘their’ researcher, although I was never considered as an ‘insider’ of the Co-operative movement. In contrast, when I visited the schools, I was received as an ‘insider’ of the Co-operative schools project and neither wholly ‘inside’ nor wholly ‘outside’ the education sector. It was unsettling,

and it became increasingly difficult as my research revealed issues within the 'host organisation' of the Co-operative College.

Whilst the close relationship with the Co-operative College was useful in terms of being able to develop understanding, access information and meet relevant people, it also proved to be complicated and inhibiting. This was broadly due to the backdrop of internal politics at the Co-operative College, which this thesis connects to wider strategic issues with the expansion of the Co-operative schools project (see Chapter 6). This environment complicated the activity of research and there was an awkwardness around my presence at the College. As disagreements and differences of opinion circulated, there was a sense in which there was an atmosphere of double-truth and insecurity. I over-heard difficult conversations, I saw raised eyebrows, and I sensed frustration and uncertainty. As part of the research, I interviewed nine members of staff (table 5.2) who were closely connected to the Co-operative schools project and, occasionally, these interviews became quite strained. For example, on one occasion, I asked a question about strategy and the participant paused, looked down the voice recorder, shook his head and mouthed a silent 'no', whilst telling me, 'yes'. On another occasion, in an effort to establish the facts of a situation, I repeated a detail that had been shared with me by one manager, only to be told by another manager that it was 'certainly an opinion'. This kind of thing happened a lot. It seemed that there was an 'accepted' version of events, which was circulated in the positive accounts of political success and rapid growth, and there were indications of another story, which seemed to draw on a different version of events. However, there was no open discussion - issues were hinted at, occasionally revealed, and then covered over.

To complicate matters further, the Co-operative College had a vested interest in my project and there was an expectation that I was researching 'on behalf' of the College. This manifested in frequent attempts to influence the lines of my inquiry. For example, I was pointed towards particular schools, which were highlighted as 'good practice' examples. Robert Hammond tended to resist critical reflection, both from his own team and from myself, and attempts that I made to raise issues that were emerging in the research were often brushed aside. This had an impact on my confidence, and my progress halted several times as I struggled to take ownership of some of the more difficult findings.

Deleuze writes about the idea of expression in Spinoza's philosophy. He explains, '[t]o explicate is to evolve, to involve is to implicate...Expression in general involves and implicates what it expresses, while also explicating and evolving it' (Deleuze, 1990:16). Here,

Deleuze suggests that the process of expression is an evolving process of implication and explication. As I reflect on this process, and of my experience, I can see how this definition might come close to the ideal of ‘embedded research’. However, my experience has been otherwise. As I have worked to express my research, I have noticed a tension between implication and explication. When I embarked upon my role as ‘embedded researcher’ within the Co-operative College I assumed that my task was to explicate an evolving phenomenon – the Co-operative schools project. As research got underway, I found that there was something static at the heart of the Co-operative schools project – it was not evolving, it was resisting. I began to notice the way in which this resistance, or stasis, revealed itself in the Co-operative College’s position as ‘saviour’ of schools from the Academies programme, in its commitment to mere representational forms of democracy, and in its refusal to accept the more uncomfortable aspects of the ‘mixed picture’ that was filtering in from the schools. As I tried to write my research, and understand the story that I had to tell, I found that I was deeply affected by the politics at the Co-operative College. Somehow, I found myself involved in the processes of politics and implicated in the practices of denial – such that writing about some aspects of this story were difficult and I became stuck. Towards the end of September 2014, I withdrew from the Co-operative College and began to engage more deeply with Spinoza’s philosophy and to explore the idea of *co-operative power* – a theory that would lead me to think through the issues that I had identified, and beyond ideas of ‘resistance’ and ‘alternative’, towards a joyful and active possibility for co-operative schools.

## **5.4 Research approach: Case Study, Ethnography or Ethnographic Case Study?**

As research got underway a number of methodological issues emerged. Initially, I found myself drawn to the idea of ethnography. It seemed to fit with the role of ‘embedded researcher’ and I felt a strong personal inclination towards qualitative inquiry and interpretive analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe the qualitative research process in terms that appealed to me, and which seemed to reflect processes that were underway as soon as I began working with the Co-operative College,

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things

in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005:3)

I thought that ethnography would give me the scope I needed for investigating the Co-operative schools project as a 'whole'. I was gathering rich data, using multiple methods and I accepted the simple definition of ethnography as 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). However, as the research evolved, it became clear that what I was doing could not be described as 'an ethnography' in the traditional sense - that is, bound to particular time and place. Harvey and Knox (2010) suggest that ethnography is,

a descriptive practice that tries to capture the affective dynamics of place and which attends specifically to the ways in which particular knowledges become credible and actionable, how they attain force and presence in the world (Harvey and Knox, 2010:117)

I began to realise that whilst I was 'embedded' at the Co-operative College my research would, necessarily, take me beyond that place and into the schools. As the field of research expanded to include multiple sites, it became clear that it was not adequate to think of it as 'an ethnography'. However, I was reluctant to accept that it was 'a case study' because of the positivist connotations that are often associated with that approach. Stake (2005) suggests that there are three types of case study: intrinsic, instrumental and collective (pp.445-448) and he insists that case study is 'a part of scientific methodology' (p.460) involving 'triangulation' and 'member checks' to guarantee validity and objectivity. However, Willis (2007) seemed to offer some possibilities for my project in his suggestion that 'ethnography and case studies are much more similar than dissimilar' (p. 240). He seems to adopt an opposite view to Stake by suggesting that case study research appeals to critical and interpretive researchers because it is 'holistic' and allows for the collection of 'rich, detailed data in an authentic setting' (p. 240). This view is also shared by Yin (2009) who suggests that a case study approach allows an investigation,

to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events - such as individual life-cycles, organisational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, international relations, and the maturation of industries. (p.4)

Therefore, my reading revealed that case study approach might offer more flexibility than it first appeared. This flexibility was important because, whilst I was researching the Co-operative schools project 'from within' at the Co-operative College, I also needed an approach that would give me the flexibility to explore 'partial' cases within the 'whole' - that

is, schools within the Co-operative schools project. My aim was to come to an understanding of what *'what makes a school co-operative?'* and I knew that I had to explore the ideas and experiences of those who were involved interpreting the Co-operative schools project within the schools. Therefore, there were multiple levels of research – initially at the Co-operative College, and then from there to schools that had joined the Co-operative schools project, and then back again at the College. I began to explore the idea of the 'ethnographic case study' but, again, the issue of 'time' persisted. Hancock and Algozzine (2016) suggest that 'ethnographic case study research' is used to explore the 'ways of life of a culture-sharing group' (p.37). Whilst this seemed appropriate for researching those schools that had joined the Co-operative schools project, they go on to explain that such investigations 'typically involve extended interaction with the group, during which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the group members' (p.37). As I will detail below, I spent four days in each case study school – it seemed like it might be a bit of a stretch to call this 'extended' or 'immersed'.

On returning from the school-based research visits, I prepared 'descriptions' of the schools, which I began to view and discuss as 'case studies' of my research. Within the schools, I had engaged in a range of qualitative methods, which included keeping detailed fieldnotes, participant observation and semi-structured interviews. All of these practices came to bear in the act of writing these 'case study' descriptions, which involved processes that resonate with ethnography. Despite a tendency in the literature to position 'case study' and 'ethnography' at methodological odds, I decided to explore 'the possibilities of assembling a combination of ethnographic and case study approaches' (White et al., 2009:22).

I continued to reflect on these methodological issues throughout the research process – as I worked analytically and reflexively between the data and the theory, navigating the issues at the College and other disappointments 'in the field', it seemed more important to understand what my procedure was than to know what to call it. As the research evolved, and when I was asked, I described my research as a qualitative case study of the Co-operative schools project, incorporating multiple sites of research, and drawing upon ethnographic methods of data collection.

### **Fieldwork and research activities**

On reflection, the concept of 'fieldwork' has not served me very well. It is difficult to think of fieldwork as a distinct practice, which took place in a specific location at a particular time. Similarly to St. Pierre: 'it's not just that I don't know where the field is, I don't know when it

is either' (St. Pierre, 2002:262). I also find it impossible to think of my fieldwork as the place where I have proved or disproved a hypothesis. In fact, it has not been like that at all. In this research, the fieldwork has been an open-ended process of discovery – it has revealed many more questions than it has provided answers and has opened a productive space for an engagement with theory. The fieldwork had two different but interrelated strands, incorporating the embedded research at the Co-operative College (Phases 2 & 5) and the extension of this out towards the Co-operative schools (Phases 2, 3 & 4). During both strands of the fieldwork, I engaged in a range of data collection methods, including participant observation, semi-structured interviews and detailed fieldnotes. As I outline the fieldwork below, I will give a brief account of the interviews and focus groups that took place (tab 5.2).

From January 2014-September 2014 (Phase 2, fig 5.1) I began to spend one regular day a week at the Co-operative College. As previously outlined, I had a desk space and was treated as one of several 'associate' members of staff. During this phase I interviewed nine Co-operative College staff, two Co-operative Group staff and one SCS staff, these interviews were digitally recorded and, later, fully transcribed. Throughout this period, I kept thorough fieldnotes and maintained a regular research journal. Due to the 'embedded' nature of my role, I felt that I was 'doing ethnography' and yet, it seemed at that time that the subject of my research was 'out there' within the Co-operative schools. I was eager to understand how the Co-operative schools project was being translated by the schools and to learn how they were being supported in that process.

My first exploratory 'field trip' was to Cornwall in 2014 (Phase 2, fig 5.1) a region where many schools had chosen to become Co-operative 'trust' schools. I interviewed three head teachers (one of whom was on the national board of SCS), two local authority officers, and one local councillor (see fig. 5.2). These interviews were digitally recorded and partially transcribed. The data from these interviews is not included in this thesis, although this research was useful for my developing perspective. This field trip exposed a number of tensions and contradictions within the Co-operative schools project, which I had also begun to identify through my research at the Co-operative College. I began to question the positioning of Co-operative schools project as a form of 'resistance' and/or 'alternative' to the expanding Academies programme (discussed in Chapter 1 and explored more fully in Chapters 6 and 7). Deepening internal politics at the College, which extended to strategic disagreements with the Schools Co-operative Society (see Chapter 6), accentuated my feelings of disconnect with the stated aims of the Co-operative schools project. In response

to this, my research focus shifted and from October 2014 – January 2015 (Phase 3, fig 5.1) I withdrew from the day-to-day politics at the College and began my readings of Spinoza, with the aim of developing a deeper theoretical engagement with the issues I had identified.

Towards the end of 2014 (Phase 3, fig 5.1), I directed my focus towards the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy model. I made email contact with the head teachers of 30 secondary Co-operative ‘converter’ academies to introduce the research and to request a 45-minute Skype interview (see contact email Appendix D and project information sheet Appendix E). I received ten positive responses and conducted eight interviews in November-December 2014 (see tab 5.2). These interviews were digitally recorded and partially transcribed. Whilst the data from these interviews is not included in this thesis, these interviews were significant in developing my perspective and important to the process of building research relationships for the next phase of the study. Following these interviews, I was invited to undertake extended research visits to four Co-operative ‘converter’ academies.

From February 2015-June 2015 (Phase 4, fig 5.1), I made extended research visits to four Co-operative ‘converter’ academies, each visit lasted four days. During these visits, I conducted interviews and focus groups across all stakeholder groups (leadership, teachers, students, parents and community). In total, I spoke to 117 people; for a detailed breakdown of research in each academy see (fig. 5.2). All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and two-thirds of these were fully transcribed. At each research site I maintained detailed fieldnotes, took digital photographs (for aide-memoire) and maintained a reflective research journal at the end of each research day.

To prepare for each research visit I requested a ‘wish list’ of interviews and focus groups that I wanted to conduct and invited the schools to arrange a suitable programme, which might also include others who they identified as important to the Co-operative ethos of the school. This flexibility of approach, though vital for establishing positive relationships, means that there was some degree of variation across the sample. Two of the schools organised a full schedule, which fulfilled all of my requests, the other two adopted a more relaxed day-by-day approach. The unscheduled approach, though in one sense more responsive, did limit the possibility of meeting with those who worked outside the school and, as a result, I was unable to meet with parents or non-teaching governors in these two schools. In each of the



schools I met with students from all key stages, members of the senior leadership teams and representatives from the teaching staff.

In 2015/16, there were significant changes of personnel at the Co-operative College - the CEO and the Vice Principal both retired, a new CEO and Vice Principal staff were appointed. There followed a significant restructuring of the staff team and a new set of strategic priorities. I returned to the College in spring 2016 (Phase 5, fig 5.1) to conduct a number of follow up interviews. During this period, I interviewed one Co-operative Group member of staff and three SCS board members. I also re-interviewed four Co-operative College staff (tab 5.2) who were able to clarify previous uncertainties and to offer a new perspective on the earlier period of research.

My theoretical rationale or 'hunch' in turning my focus to the Co-operative 'converter' academies was that these might be understood as sites of co-operative possibility (a la Spinoza) rather than as sites of resistance (a la the Co-operative 'trust' schools). As I embarked upon this phase of my research (Phase 4, fig 5.1), I called it 'my field work' and 'the empirical phase' – I hoped that I would finally 'find out' what a Co-operative school was. I imagined that I would find examples of Spinoza's 'joyful' co-operation at work in the Co-operative academy schools and thus 'prove' my hypothesis (I didn't actually have a hypothesis but I thought that I needed one and I hoped that I would find it 'in the field'). It didn't happen quite like this. However, it was during this period of this intense research and reflection, which was occasionally difficult and disappointing, that I came to understand that 'my field work' had been taking place all along. As I dutifully developed the 'case-studies' of the Co-operative academy schools (which were eagerly anticipated back at the Co-operative College) I realised that they told me less about their 'being co-operative' and revealed more about their experience of the Co-operative schools project. Thus, it was almost at the end of my research, that I came to realise that my thesis would not be about 'the Co-operative schools movement', as had been suggested to me from the outset, but was in fact about the 'Co-operative schools project' of the UK Co-operative movement. I realised that I had allowed others to influence my work in ways that had been difficult to recognise at the time. The Co-operative College had encouraged me to look outwards from the College, as 'their researcher', to interpret what they called the 'Co-operative schools movement' rather than to

look inwards, as was my inclination, to the substance and ideas of what I have decided to call the 'Co-operative schools project'.

### **School-based research strategy – developing case studies**

The majority of the school-based research was conducted via interviews or student focus groups. These were semi-structured (see example Appendix C) and a key discussion, particularly amongst the adult participants involved the decision/motivations to become a Co-operative 'converter' academy. All participants explained what the Co-operative ethos meant to them and were asked to consider what difference this ethos made in the school community. The interview schedule existed as a guideline and as much as possible I encouraged participants to share their experiences and ideas using their own language and according to their own priorities. I occasionally used a probe (Zeisel, 1984:140) to encourage a participant 'to clarify a point' or 'to explain further what she meant' (p.40).

All interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and, during the process, I also took detailed notes. As soon as possible after the interview or focus group, I reviewed my notes and added-in any remembered details or analytical memos, which contributed to the processes of thematic analysis, which came later (see Appendix J for an example of data analysis). At the end of each research day, I maintained a reflective research journal, where I recorded significant incidents in the day, reflected on themes that were emerging, made connections with existing ideas and considered any questions or issues that were arising. This served as preparation for the next day of research and began the process of thematic analysis and data reduction.

At the end of each extended school visit I produced a detailed summary of the research exercise and the data collected. These were extensive summary documents, which included material drawn from my research journal, interview notes and analytical memos. This process enabled me to organise and process large amounts of data and helped to inform decisions regarding the selection of data for transcription and analysis.

## **5.6 Ethics and anonymity**

Throughout this research I have been guided by two main sets of procedures in relation to the practice of ethical research. Firstly, I followed the *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2011) that are published by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). Secondly,

the research was approved by Manchester Metropolitan University's Ethics Committee and I followed the advice attached to that approval.

In addition to the over-arching guidelines mentioned above, I also followed the ethics and security procedures at each of the school-based research sites. In each case, this included carrying photographic identification at all times and agreeing to a full Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. In each case, I was permitted move around the buildings and to conduct research with students. I was careful to ensure that all research encounters with individual students took place in populated circumstances, for example in the dining room or during a lesson. The most common way that students participated in this research was through small focus-group discussions of four or more students – this was both an ethical and pedagogical research decision.

In each school a senior leader was the 'gate keeper' with whom I made initial contact and negotiated the research. In each case, the first contact was via email (Appendix D) and included a project information sheet to introduce myself and the research (Appendix E). Each research visit began with an initial meeting with a senior leader (usually the head teacher). During this session, I double-checked things that had been agreed prior to my arrival. For example, I explained the research, outlined the methods that I would use to gather information, and checked that my use of a digital voice recorder was approved in principle. I also showed the Study Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form (Appendix F), which would be given to every participant at the beginning of the interviews. These documents described the research, explained how the findings would be used, how the data would be stored, how anonymity and confidentiality would be upheld, and emphasised the voluntary nature of participation. My purpose in discussing the process and these documents with a senior leader was to confirm and agree the expectations of my visit with them. I did not assume that his or her consent to conduct the research was a general consent and, at the beginning of every interview and focus group, I introduced myself and the research. I explained the forms, giving participants the opportunity to read them and to change their mind about their involvement if they wished to do so. The same procedure was followed for every interview that involved participants from the Co-operative College, the Co-operative Group and the Schools Co-operative Society.

Protecting the anonymity of all research participants has been a priority in the production of this thesis. Measures have been taken to ensure that all data used in this thesis is anonymised and all individual research participants, across all research sites, have been given pseudonyms

(including those who were connected to the identified organisations of the Co-operative College, the Co-operative Group and the Schools Co-operative Society). The names and locations of participating schools and academies have been changed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The most recent Ofsted report of each school has been consulted but these are not included in the references.

All data from the research was stored securely and all digital data was password protected.

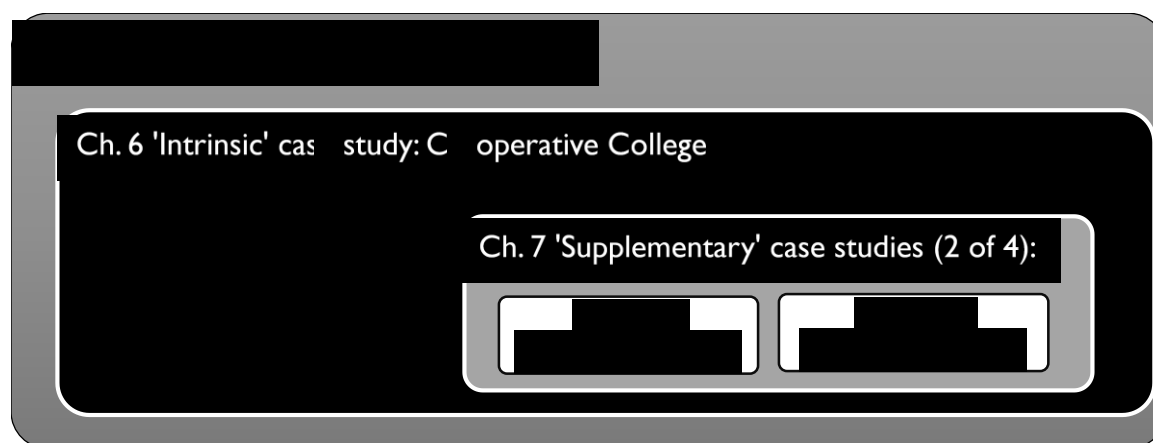
A table showing all digitally recorded research interviews and focus groups (tab. 5.2)

Phase	Description	Method	Persons
Phase 2,3,4 & 5 <i>(for discussion of this case see Chapter 6)</i>	<b>Co-operative College</b> 1 x principal interview (three occasions) 1 x schools lead interview (four occasions) 2 x regional manager interviews 5 x other staff interviews Observation and participation including regular desk space, meetings etc.	Interview Participant Observation	9
Phase 2, 4 & 5	<b>The Co-operative Group</b> 3 x staff interviews <b>Schools Co-operative Society</b> 3 x board member interviews 1 x regional associate interviews	Interviews	7
Phase 2	<b>Regional visit to Cornwall</b> 3 x senior leader interviews (Coop 'trust' Schools) 2 x local authority officer interviews 1 x councillor interview	Interview	6
Phase 3	<b>Skype interviews with Co-op academy leaders</b> 8 x academy principal interviews	Interview (Skype)	8
Phase 4	<b>Woodby School (Feb 2015 - 4 Days)</b> 1 x academy principal interview (and tour of school) 2 x governor interview 9 x teaching staff interviews 1 x parent focus group (3) 1 x student focus group KS3 & KS4 (6) 2 x 'Learning Walks' KS3 & KS4 with SLT & governors (7) Observation including corridors, lessons, assemblies, cafeteria, staffroom	Interview Focus Group Participant Observation	28
Phase 4 <i>(for discussion of this case see Chapter 7)</i>	<b>Shorebank Academy School (April 2015 – 4 days)</b> 1 x academy principal interview 3 x teaching staff interviews 4 x other staff interviews 3 x student focus group KS3, KS4, KS5 (20) 1 x school tour with KS3 & KS4 students (4) Observation including corridors, lessons, assemblies, cafeteria, staffroom.	Interview Focus Group Participant Observation	32
Phase 4 <i>(for discussion of this case see Chapter 7)</i>	<b>Steepston Academy School (May 2015 – 4 days)</b> 1 x academy principal interview 1 x school tour with deputy principal 11 x teaching staff interviews 6 x other staff interviews 2 x student focus groups KS3 & KS4 (10) Observation including corridors, lessons, assemblies, cafeteria, staffroom.	Interview Focus Group Participant Observation	29
Phase 4	<b>Raines Chase Co-operative Academy (June 2015 – 4 days)</b> 1 x academy principal interview 1 x deputy principal interview 5 x staff interviews 2 x student focus groups KS3 & KS4 (16) 2 x community interviews 1 x governor interview 2 x parent interviews Observation including corridors, lessons, assemblies, cafeteria, staffroom.	Interview Focus Group Participant Observation	28
Total number of participants			147
Total number of digitally recorded interviews/focus groups			94
Total number of full transcripts prepared for analysis			65

## 5.7 Description of the case studies presented in this thesis

In the production of this thesis I present three cases, which work to illuminate what I have termed the ‘thesis case’ of the Co-operative schools project. Here the ‘thesis case’ refers to the evolving phenomenon of the Co-operative schools project – that is, the subject of the research inquiry. The particular cases represented are: the Co-operative College, which I have identified as the ‘intrinsic’ case (Stake, 1995) and, Steepston Co-operative Academy and Shorebank Co-operative Academy, which I have identified as ‘supplementary’ cases. As the exploratory study evolved it became apparent that the Co-operative College was central to developing an understanding of the Co-operative schools project – it was the locus of the project and, as such, a significant site of research. The Co-operative College seemed to present itself as an ‘intrinsic’ case, where the case itself became the focus of attention – it was not studied to learn something about something else but to understand more about the case itself (Stake, 1995). The cases of Steepston Academy and Shorebank Academy are ‘supplementary’ to the intrinsic case because these are included to provide more information about the Co-operative College and about the school experience of the Co-operative schools project. In a sense they also become ‘instrumental’ (Stake, 1995) because the insights that are provided are used to develop ideas, in Chapter 8, for the development of an expansive co-operative pedagogy, using Spinoza’s theory of co-operation. For a figurative representation of the case study organisation, see below (fig 5.3).

The relationship of the case studies (fig. 5.3)



### The Co-operative College

The Co-operative College has played a key role in the development and expansion of the Co-operative schools project. The Co-operative College was founded in 1919 to provide Co-operative education and training to Co-operative organisations. In 2016, it became financially independent of the Co-operative Group, and it is a now registered charity with various

education, training and research projects forming a portfolio of work in the UK and overseas. In 2008, it expanded into English schools sector by providing a range of purchasable products and services to schools. There are approximately 20 members of permanent, full-time staff based at the Co-operative College, with a smaller team of 3-6 people taking responsibility for the schools work. The Co-operative College also engages a workforce of self-employed consultants, who are regularly contracted to undertake short-term projects on behalf of the College.

### **Steepston Co-operative Academy, Strandgate**

Steepston Academy joined the Co-operative schools project in 2009, initially as a Co-operative 'trust' school. It was one of the first schools to transfer to Co-operative 'converter' academy status in 2011. Steepston operates a comprehensive 11-18 admissions policy in a highly selective borough and, in comparison to the national average, there are fewer students at Steepston who attain at the upper end of the scale. The school supports approximately 1100 students and is routinely undersubscribed. The number of students who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 26%, which is considerably higher than the national average. The proportion of minority ethnic students is low but steadily increasing, as is the number of students for whom English is not their first language. The school has a special on-site unit for students with physical disabilities and a larger proportion of students than the national average receive support for special education needs and/or disabilities.

In 2015, Steepston Academy was designated a 'Good' school, following an Ofsted inspection in January 2012.

### **Shorebank Co-operative Academy, Riverton**

Shorebank Academy joined the Co-operative schools project in 2010, initially as a Co-operative 'trust' school. It transferred to Co-operative 'converter' academy status in February 2013. Shorebank operates a comprehensive 11-19 admissions policy and, in comparison to the national average, there are fewer students at Shorebank who attain at the upper end of the scale. The school supports approximately 960 students and it is routinely undersubscribed. The number of students who are eligible for free school meals (FSM) is 14.2%, which is lower than the national average. The proportion of disadvantaged students, who are supported by the pupil premium, is above average. The vast majority of students on

roll are white British; there are very few students who speak English as an additional language.

In 2015, Shorebank Academy was designated an 'Inadequate' school, following an Ofsted inspection in January 2015. This inspection which found 'serious weaknesses' triggered a programme of monitoring inspections, which were ongoing at the time of the research.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has detailed the ways in which the research design and research questions were developed, it includes an account of the methods that were used and the processes that were employed to manage and analyse the data. I have considered the challenges of embedded research and I have detailed the ethical procedures undertaken.

This qualitative research strategy, which took place over an extended period and across multiple sites, involved integrated processes of data collection, analysis and reflection and has generated a substantial amount of research material. There is large proportion of work that is not included in this thesis. The following chapters include selective data from three research sites. Chapter 6 concentrates on the vision, strategy and priorities of the Co-operative schools project, as it was developed and co-ordinated from the Co-operative College. Chapter 7 presents two case studies of Co-operative 'converter' academies and focuses on the way in which these schools have interpreted and engaged with the Co-operative schools project and how they have been supported to do so. Chapter 8 will return to Spinoza's theory of transindividuality to consider how it may allow for a new way of thinking about schools and schooling.





## Chapter 6. Out in the field at the Co-operative College

*Co-ops are vulnerable to co-optation because they lack a political philosophy that can guide genuine cooperation and counter non-cooperative influences.*  
(Ratner, 2015:18)

*The more perfection each thing has, the more active and the less passive it is.  
Conversely, the more active it is, the more perfect it is.*  
(Spinoza, 1996:EVP40)

Central to my thesis is the claim that the Co-operative schools project lacks a theoretical and strategic foundation. In this chapter, I demonstrate this assertion by providing an insight into the strategy and priorities of the Co-operative College and its relationship with the Schools Co-operative Society (SCS). My analysis shows that a confused idea of the Co-operative schools project circulated at the Co-operative College and that this was compounded by a muddled strategy, and a complicated relationship with SCS. I suggest that these factors have led to a wider uncertainty about what a Co-operative school *is*, what it can *do*, and *how* it can do it.

Throughout the study, I maintained a close relationship with the Co-operative College; this privileged position also enabled access to select personnel at SCS and the Co-operative Group (for a diagram showing the relationship between these organisations please see Appendix G). In this chapter, I draw upon this wide spectrum of perspectives and present data that was collected over several research phases (see Chapter 5). Much of the data presented here was gathered during formal interviews with participants (see Chapter 5). During these interviews, I tended to ask the question ‘what happened?’ and, as a result, this data provides a retrospective view of the Co-operative schools project, focusing on the expansion that occurred from 2008. It is a mixed account – for the most part, the early growth of the Co-operative schools project was seen as an exciting and hopeful development. As time went on, some maintained this positive outlook, and were ambitious for the future. Others were more reflective, critical about mistakes that had been made, and cautious about what might happen next. In 2014, I spent one day a week at the Co-operative College. I observed the organisation at work and was included in many aspects of daily business. During this phase, my question was, ‘what happens?’ and this data provides a rich insight into the day-to-day operations at the Co-operative College and in its relationship with SCS. To focus in on some of the issues that were significant during this period I include an account of a routine meeting at the Co-operative College, which took place in May 2014.

This meeting reflects the key themes that surfaced during the interviews and reveals internal politics at the Co-operative College and strategic tensions with SCS.

Across all phases of the research, the Co-operative College occupied a central place in my inquiry. The College had played a key role in the expansion of the Co-operative schools project but, as the momentum began to slow, and uncertainties about the respective roles of the College and SCS began to surface, it seemed to some that the hopeful vision of the Co-operative schools project was beginning to unravel. In short, a complex picture emerged, and whilst everyone was committed to an idea of Co-operative schools, there seemed to be little agreement on anything else.

Throughout these accounts, it is impossible to ignore the wider context and, in particular, the pivotal role of the always-controversial Academies programme. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the Academies programme, originally designed to ‘reboot’ failing schools, was launched by New Labour in 2000 and was gradually rolled-out over the following decade. In 2010, the Coalition government dramatically expanded the programme, with a vision that *all* state schools would become academies (DfE, 2010). I suggest that it was in relation to this contentious reform of education that the Co-operative schools project gathered momentum - initially as an *alternative*, then as a *resistance*, and always, simultaneously, as a feature of the *marketisation* programme that was in operation.

Throughout this chapter, in order to develop my interpretation and analysis, I return to Spinoza’s theory of *co-operative power*. I draw upon the idea of the *conatus* as I discuss the active and passive strategies of the Co-operative College. I consider Spinoza’s transindividual theory of the affects, in combination with ‘common notions’, to show how a merely hopeful vision and an increasingly reactive politics was allowed to take the place of a well-defined concept and a proactive strategy of action. In pursuing this Spinozist analysis, I conclude that these ‘passive’ and ‘inadequate’ approaches work to suppress the project’s *co-operative power* to act and therefore provide an uncertain foundation for co-operative transformation across the wider schools network.

## **6.1 Introducing the Co-operative College and the Schools Co-operative Society**

### **The Co-operative College**

The Co-operative College (also ‘the College’) is a small, Manchester-based organisation with deep historical links across the UK Co-operative movement. Traditionally, its field of expertise is the provision of training and education to Co-operative organisations in the UK

and overseas. With the expansion of New Labour's Specialist Schools programme (see Chapter 2), the Co-operative Group agreed to sponsor a number of Co-operative Business and Enterprise schools. In 2004, the Co-operative College were commissioned to establish a network, and to create specific training and curriculum resources for the participating schools. This venture proved successful and, as the Co-operative schools project progressed, the College played a key role in the development and promotion of 'trust' schools from 2008, and 'converter' academies from 2010. Initially, the Co-operative Group commissioned the College to undertake this work then, as the Co-operative models rolled out, it assumed an independent role by providing a range of purchasable products and services to the schools. Its most significant offer was the provision of a tailored project management service to guide schools through the legal and technical aspects of conversion (Appendix H). It also developed a small range of 'post-conversion' training and development products to help schools establish themselves as Co-operatives (Appendix I). Initially, this strand of work was folded into the existing workflow of the organisation. However, as demand increased, the need for a dedicated operations team was recognised. In 2009, Leanne Hamlet was appointed to lead a new team of five staff, which would provide a range of administrative functions including communications, sales and marketing and membership development. This 'in-house' team would also provide support to an already operating 'external' team of self-employed consultants who were engaged to provide project management services to schools as they converted. This national workforce consisted of six Regional Managers and a larger number of College Associates who were contracted as required.

By the time I arrived, in 2014, further reorganisation had occurred (see fig. 6.2 below). Towards the end of 2012, in response to changing priorities, Robert Hammond disbanded the existing 'in-house' schools team. A new team was led by John Spearman, also the North West Regional Manager, and included an expanded role for Lucy Hammond (Robert Hammond's daughter and, previously, the team administrator). The wider 'external' team of Regional Managers and College Associates remained in place although, as the number of school conversions dropped off, this workforce had become less active on behalf of the Co-operative College and several consultants were picking-up related work on behalf of the Schools Co-operative Society (see fig. 6.2 below). Leanne Hamlet remained at the Co-operative College, although she was no longer linked to the school conversion work. Her new role had a broader education and training focus, also incorporating the small range of 'post-conversion' materials for Co-operative schools. Throughout the entire period, the Co-operative schools project remained of particular personal interest to Robert Hammond,

Principal and Chief Executive (1999-2015), and this work commanded a significant proportion of his time.

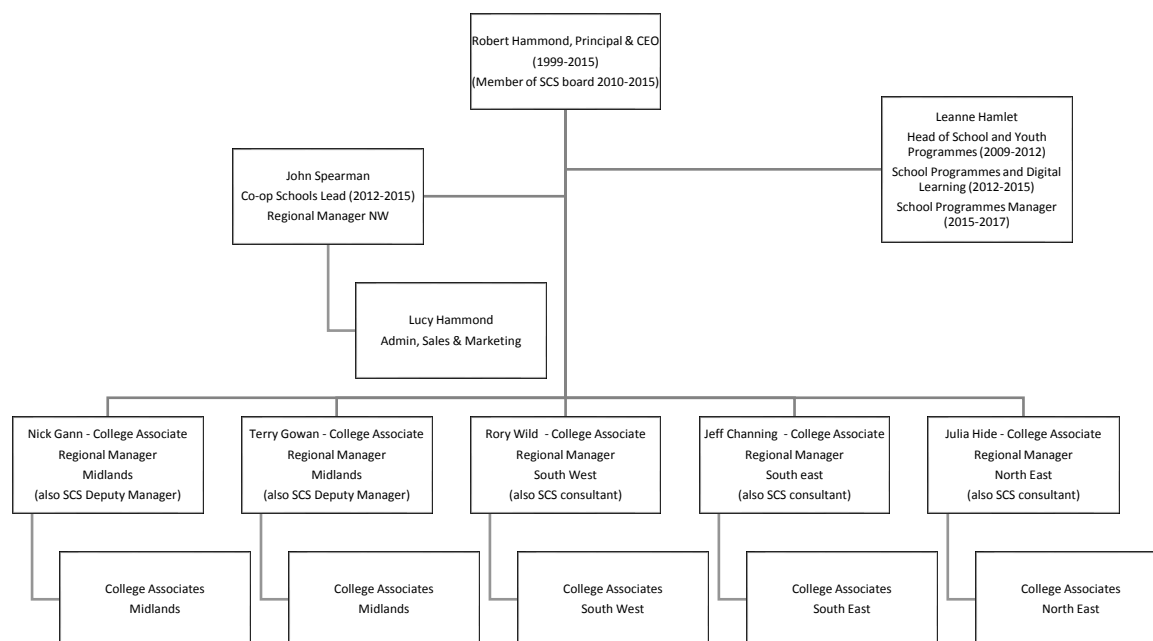


Fig. 6.2. Diagram showing the restructured schools team, operating from 2012-2015. Information provided by the Co-operative College in 2014.

## The Schools Co-operative Society

The Schools Co-operative Society (SCS) formed in 2009 as a member-association for Co-operative schools. It operates with a regional structure and there is a national board, broadly drawn from Co-operative schools across the regions. It is an ‘apex’ Co-operative (a Co-operative of Co-operatives), which was initially established as resource for the expanding schools network. All Co-operative schools were expected to pay the nominal membership fee and become members - this expectation was not formalised until 2013. At the beginning there were optimistic ambitions for SCS and it was anticipated that it would become an ‘independent network’ and ‘provider of services’ to its members – it had been thought that these services would replicate the traditional provision of the local authority e.g. procurement and school improvement. The following is a description of SCS, published in *Co-operative Schools: Stronger together* – a promotional brochure, circulated by the Co-operative College 2010-2015:

The Schools Co-operative Society provides a support network, enabling both existing and prospective co-operative Trust schools to share ideas and best practice and develop services for member schools. It is owned and controlled by its member schools and its remit includes exploiting the benefits of joint procurement, sharing expertise from curriculum

development to school improvement, and giving co-operative schools a voice in the national education policy agenda. (Co-operative College, 2010:7)

In fact, this vision changed over time and, when I arrived at the Co-operative College in 2014, the role of SCS was still under active construction. This presented a complex problem for the Co-operative schools project. By this time, there were a large number of schools - some estimates suggest as many as 850 - which expected 'a support network'. Some of them (as I will show in Chapter 7) anticipated 'the benefits of joint procurement' and imagined 'sharing expertise from curriculum development to school improvement'. In fact, by 2014, the question of what SCS could do, would do, and should do, had become a significant issue. The Co-operative College continued to project manage school conversions and as these Co-operative schools looked for the SCS support network, which was yet to develop many of its promised services, difficult questions of blame and responsibility began to surface.

The question of SCS's independence is a significant one – in reality, it was a highly dependent organisation, which was, in many ways, indistinguishable from the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College. In order to help establish SCS it was agreed that these two organisations would provide financial and 'in-kind' support. For its part, the Co-operative Group agreed to finance the part-time salary of the Chief Executive, Phil Lincoln, a commitment that it maintained until 2015. The Co-operative College agreed to provide 'in-kind' clerking services to the SCS board, a commitment that it maintained from March 2010 to January 2013. As founder members, The Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College were represented on the SCS board. In order to fulfil this responsibility, between 2009-2015, several Co-operative College employees were serving members on the national board of SCS, including Leanne Hamlet and Robert Hammond.

The relationship between The Co-operative College and SCS was further entwined when the network of self-employed 'College Associates' also began to undertake consultancy work on behalf of SCS. Adele Gaffin, herself a board member for both organisations, explained how the deployment of the same personnel across both organisations led to a 'lack of clarity' about the respective roles of the Co-operative College and SCS,

As a board member, I have struggled to understand the nature of the consultants and the associates. I felt, and I still feel - though we are beginning to develop some better clarity - that there is a lack of clarity about the difference between the College and the SCS, which has been fuzzed. In some ways quite deliberately. But, mostly, it has been fuzzed because the associates tend to be employed by both and, in being employed by both,

people are unclear about on whose behalf they are doing any piece of work. (Adele Gaffin, 2016. SCS board member, from 2013; Co-operative College board member, from 2014)

Mike Kerrick, the Co-operative College employee who provided the clerking services to SCS, explained how these close relationships were the source of confusion amongst the member schools, who had believed that they were joining '*the* Co-op' – a single organisation,

Some schools didn't understand the difference between the Co-operative Group, the Co-operative College, SCS and their own Co-operative school. But the thing that we keep having to drum into people is: it's not *the* Co-op, it's *your* Co-op – and when people get that, it helps. (Mike Kerrick, 2014)

Here the question of responsibility is returned to the schools themselves. Ignoring the claims of the promotional literature and the promises given to schools as they converted, the schools were expected to operate independently with the College placing particular emphasis on the Co-operative values of 'self-help' and 'self-responsibility'. Despite the very close connections of the two organisations from the outset, the Co-operative College were convinced that the issues belonged to SCS and that it was powerless to intervene. Leanne Hamlet, previously a member of the board at SCS, explained,

I am not involved with the SCS. I know what the SCS was intended to be - it was intended to provide services to Co-operative schools - procurement, school improvement services, things like that. To be a democratic forum, to be a voice in the wider education debate and to some extent be a support network. It is not that. Any holding to account that is to be done is to be done by the SCS. (Leanne Hamlet, 2016)

Although the Co-operative schools project expanded into the schools sector, with a vision to create a 'Co-operative alternative' within the mainstream, it lacked a clear idea of *what* that was and *how* it would work in practice. The Co-operative College responded to opportunities, which were, in the first instance, created by changing education policy, and then, to a set of circumstances and expectations, which unfolded within the transforming schools sector. As it positioned the Co-operative schools project, first as an alternative, then as a resistance, there was an unrealistic vision of SCS as a self-supporting nexus, which would, in time, provide everything that schools might need. This chapter explores the way in which the Co-operative schools project gathered momentum without an active strategy and the next section demonstrates how this was related to the absence of a clear idea. If we apply Spinoza's idea of the *conatus* to the Co-operative schools project we can begin to see how its

passive positioning – without concept or strategy – means that it was continually reduced to unconscious and reactive responses, which served to diminish any *co-operative power* to act.

## 6.2 Co-operation as alternative: seeking an adequate idea

### Co-operative schools - from 'transient projects' to 'big ideas'

As Robert Hammond reflected on a long career in Co-operative education he remembered working with schools in the 1990s and recalled various 'transient projects' which, he said, were small-scale, and focused on 'bringing Co-operation into the curriculum' through 'enterprise education'. He credited this early work as being crucial to his own perspective, and suggested that this period was when he began to develop 'the big ideas about where you went with this' – which, he said, led to his work on the contemporary Co-operative schools project. Hammond traced a line through the early 2000s, noting the particular contribution that the Co-operative College had made to research and thinking on 'the potential of Co-operative models in education services delivery'. Hammond referred, specifically, to two publications (reviewed in Chapter 3) and suggested that these were significant levers in the expansion of the Co-operative schools project. *Co-operation and Learning* (2003) made the case for the Co-operative Business and Enterprise Specialist Schools, which followed in 2004, and *Co-operative Values Make a Difference* (2007) made the case for the Co-operative 'trust' model, which followed in 2008.

Looking back on the 'transformative' Co-operative Business and Enterprise Specialist Schools network, which the Co-operative College had worked to facilitate, Hammond remembers being unclear about how and why it had been successful,

We developed a network and what was interesting was how that network became very supportive, how those schools really did transform their performance and achievement, but it was done by really good informal Co-operation. I always remember sitting at one meeting and being really puzzled about trying to work out what was the glue that was holding this together. (Robert Hammond, July 2014)

By his own account, Hammond is oblivious to the nature of the *co-operative power* that was generated between the schools. He acknowledges that something 'interesting' was happening and suggests that 'it was done by really good informal Co-operation', but he is unclear about what this was, or how it was working. He admits to 'being really puzzled' about the 'glue that was holding this together', which is particularly ironic when we consider that 'it' was



supposed to be the Co-operative approach – the values, the resources, the network – which his organisation had been commissioned to provide to the participating schools.

As he joined the dots and made links between various pieces of work, Hammond described the way in which the (unclear) *idea* of Co-operative schools project seemed to take hold. New Labour were exploring radical changes to public service delivery and, in education, the focus was on the new foundation ‘trust’ model and the creation of a ‘mixed-economy’ of providers in education (see Chapter 2). The Co-operative College, keen to build on the success of the Co-operative Specialist Schools network, worked to develop a Co-operative ‘trust’ model. In 2007, Hammond remembers a time of great activity, there was an appetite for innovation, and the landscape was fast moving,

We [were] being seen without us knowing - ‘hang on, there is something interesting happening’ - and I think there was at that time an acute awareness, well a growing awareness, that there was something interesting happening amongst things. There was a readiness to say - ‘well, let’s explore this’ - and we had very high-level DFE officials sitting in on that work. They didn’t understand it at all, but we worked with [a lawyer] to develop the model and [he] just built on other multi-stakeholder models that we had developed for other sectors. Word spread and we quickly got interest from a number of schools, but we had no concept of the scale. [We produced] the publication *Co-operative Values Make a Difference*, which we then got Ed Balls to launch at the Labour Party conference and that stimulated a lot of interest. (Robert Hammond, July 2014)

Hammond recalled the atmosphere with a dual sense of confusion and excitement - the College were keen to be part of the innovation process but it seems that they did not fully grasp their role. When Hammond recalls ‘a growing awareness that there was something interesting happening amongst things’ he points to the political appetite for the Co-operative ‘trust’ model and the sense that the College were caught up in bigger, uncertain, processes of change. When he says, ‘word spread’ and ‘we had no concept of the scale’, he points to the lack of strategy and he admits that they were unprepared for the growth that was to come.

Hammond remembers feeling unsure of the proposals for the Co-operative ‘trust’ model and he approached his friend, John Spearman – a local authority officer with expertise in school governance. Hammond recalls Spearman’s immediate enthusiasm for the model,

I knew [John] from governance work – he was the head of governance services in [local authority] and I asked him to read a draft of *Values Make a Difference*. Simply because I wanted someone in that mind-set of governance to comment – y’know, had I lost the plot? And he often quotes

back to me now, “[Robert] you have absolutely no idea how big this is going to be” (Robert Hammond, 2014)

This moment is significant in Hammond’s narrative – he admits that he did not fully grasp his own ‘big idea’ but that he was excited by the potential that others seemed to see and, although there was no *clear idea* of how things would work in practice, the Co-operative College was swept along on a current of potential and opportunity. Spinoza argues that the striving *conatus* draws on multiple resources in order to preserve itself – integrating, mixing and withdrawing - I suggest that without a clear idea of *what* it was promoting and *how* it would work in practice, the Co-operative College positioned the Co-operative schools project in a passive role. This served to weaken its potential and, as external events took over and other priorities emerged, Hammond found himself unable, or unwilling, to withdraw. As time went on this determination to remain involved, without clarity of purpose, would serve to reduce, rather than augment, the *co-operative power* of the Co-operative schools project.

### **Outward growth and internal disagreements**

The period that followed the launch of the Co-operative ‘trust’ model was intense. Schools were attracted by the vision of an ‘alternative’ school, which was outlined in *Co-operative Values Make a Difference* (2007) and, by the middle of the following year, the first trusts had opened. In 2009, the model received a boost from central government via the positive publication of *Co-operative Schools – making a difference* (DCSF, 2009). As I discussed in Chapter 3, this document pledged additional funds to support the Co-operative schools project and it recommended ‘trust’ status as one option for under-performing National Challenge schools (see Chapter 2) – this is likely to have been a significant motivating factor for schools facing closure under this programme (see, for example, Steepston case study in Chapter 7).

In 2009, as growth got underway, Leanne Hamlet described a busy and chaotic period at the Co-operative College. She recalled how ‘the phone was red hot’ with school inquiries, and she remembered the strategic disagreements that began to surface early on. As the newly formed ‘in-house’ schools team worked to get up to speed, Hamlet explained that they were hampered by ‘problematic and dysfunctional’ communication with the already existing ‘external’ team of Regional Managers, who had been undertaking school conversions since 2008. This lack of agreement across teams, which were central to the development of the Co-operative schools project, points to a lack of transindividuality. The teams were not

communicating and the differences in their approaches would have implications for the whole initiative.

Hamlet suggested that there was a ‘philosophical tension’ between the two teams. She believed that the external team prioritised ‘a structural perspective’, which presented the trust model as an alternative to academisation, and that they neglected to emphasise the crucial ‘membership development’ aspect. There was a strong sense of frustration in her account, particularly as she recalled the mismanagement of the additional £5000 that had been available to each converting school for training and development. These funds were held by the Co-operative College and Hamlet was convinced that the Regional Managers ‘never really pushed with the schools that membership was something that they needed to develop’, thus acting as a barrier to the development of co-operative practice in the schools. She explained that the Regional Managers were ‘in total control of the relationships with schools’ and, without those established connections, it was ‘difficult to get membership going’ post-conversion. Here, Hamlet makes explicit reference to the barriers that were created due to the lack of co-operation and transindividuality between the ‘in-house’ and the ‘external’ teams. One result was that the money was not well managed, ‘a huge chunk of it was never claimed’<sup>4</sup>, but a bigger issue was that opportunities were lost. Hamlet remembered, bitterly, the failure to get schools to engage, ‘we did things like flog them online membership development courses, which they bought but never used’. She blamed the ‘external team’ for failing to emphasise the significance of ‘membership development’ at the time of the conversion, as a result the schools did not recognise importance of ‘membership development’ and the ‘in-house’ team did not have the relationships (or the capacity) to come afterwards and convince them to undertake those processes.

Whilst Hamlet was certainly frustrated by the mismanagement of funds, she was also deeply concerned by the lost opportunity to develop co-operative practice in the schools. As she talked more about the so-called ‘philosophical tension’, which was played-out across ‘problematic and dysfunctional meetings’, it became clear that this originated in a contested idea about the motivation of the converting schools and how this was managed by the College. As I showed in the previous section, there was no clear idea about *what* a Co-operative school was and, of course, this meant that there could be no real agreement on *why*

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<sup>4</sup> In 2016, I was advised that all unclaimed funds had been returned to central government.

the model was popular. As the Co-operative schools project expanded rapidly from 2010, the question of what was motivating this growth was not fully addressed.

### **Co-operation motivation – instinct or practice?**

Leanne Hamlet was critical of assumptions that were made by the Co-operative College during the period of rapid expansion. She suggested that the ‘external’ team rarely checked understandings and motivations of schools, and that conversions happened ‘without ever really establishing the school’s motivation’. She was worried that insufficient attention was given to the Co-operative values and how they might work in practice,

I am not saying that [the conversion team] don’t mention the values - I mean they are there on the PowerPoint - but I don’t think that they explain what it means in practice. [Robert] takes it for granted that people understand. (Leanne Hamlet, 2014)

Robert Hammond admitted that he was not clear on the motivations that schools had in joining the Co-operative schools project. He suggested that there might be an ‘instinct’ for Co-operation within the schools sector,

I think that deep inside many in education is what I would call an intuitive instinct for Co-operation. What we have done, and I think we’ve done it very skilfully, is actually sort of say how you can articulate that instinct into a model that actually works ... I think that the role we have played is almost parallel to some of the Co-operative pioneers of the mid-nineteenth century ... the catalytic role of how you inspire people to want to do it ... how you commodify the processes so that you can make it as simple and easy as possible (Robert Hammond, July 2014)

During my time at the College, I heard about this ‘Co-operative instinct’ quite often. There was the suggestion, repeated across the team, that some schools ‘got it’ and others did not. I want to suggest that in Spinoza’s terms this positioning is passive, placing the success of the Co-operative schools project always elsewhere. It also underlines the lack of strategy and control at the College – schools ‘got it’, ‘word spread’, it ‘grew topsy’. In the passage above, Hammond seems to suggest that an ‘intuitive instinct for Co-operation’ already existed within education and the Co-operative schools project merely worked to ‘commodify’ this. He seems to believe that the participating schools saw a wider scope for co-operative practice within their school communities and that the work of the Co-operative College was to ‘pioneer’ the models and ‘inspire’ schools to act on that ‘intuitive instinct’. The question is whether it is possible to translate this ‘instinct’, which Spinoza might call an ‘inadequate idea’, into a meaningful and empowering practice. Is the Co-operative schools project able to draw

upon the appropriate expertise, experience and resources to provide the whole-school transformation that the vision inspired?

Leanne Hamlet thought that the power of the Co-operative school was in its ‘membership’ and, as she explained how this concept might work in practice, I began to understand how she translated that idea of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Co-operative movement to the 21st century schools sector. In doing so, she offered the first description of what a Co-operative school might be, and how it might work in practice, that I had heard,

The strength of a Co-operative model is that within a school the Co-operative values are reflected in [the] relationships between staff and students, and in classroom practice, and in the engagement of the school with its community. These co-operative relations can and will lead to significant improved outcomes for schools ... Part of that, which [Robert Hammond] has poo-pooed all along, is the idea that there really is a good way of integrating co-operative pedagogy a la Kagan ... Membership is the most important part of it. The key thing that schools really deliver for their students is about relationships. The overall experience of school is very much rooted in the relationships that exist between everybody ... I would want schools to be democratic in the broadest sense - where students and young people are represented, where staff have a voice, where there isn't a top down approach. That is how the [Co-operative] values are embedded. Democracy in terms of where power lies - those [Co-operative] values are embodied in good and positive relationships between people. (Leanne Hamlet, 2015)

As Hamlet described the vitality of ‘membership’ to the practice of Co-operation schools, I began to understand it in terms of the ‘relational ontology’ (Balibar, 1998) of Spinoza’s transindividual theory. As Hamlet described the significance of relationships, the connection of the school to its community and the importance of co-operative pedagogy she described the elements of Co-operative practice that I had seen at Steepston and Shorebank (see Chapter 7). However, as detailed above, the wider College strategy was not supportive of ‘membership development’ and Robert Hammond ‘poo-pooed’ the significance of pedagogy to the Co-operative schools project.

### **6.3 Co-operation as resistance: binary thinking and passivity**

The Co-operative expansion into the schools sector took place over a number of years and was shaped through opportunities provided by changing government policy. The decade following the controversial introduction of academies in 2000 was characterised by significant structural reform to the schools sector and an expanding role for business and philanthropy (see Chapter 2). The Co-operative schools project evolved throughout this

period - Specialist Schools, foundation 'trusts', the National Challenge, and the Academies programme all played a role in shaping the Co-operative schools programme. Within this reforming process the Co-operative schools project was initially positioned itself as an 'alternative' to mainstream options, particularly to the academisation programme. However, as time went on, it began to occupy the more complex position of 'resistance' (ostensibly to forms of 'marketisation' and 'privatisation' but, as will be shown below, there was also a complex relationship to the expanding Academies programme).

In 2010, a new Coalition government entered parliament with a strong agenda for education and a radical vision to expand the Academies programme (DFE, 2010). The new government and the singular focus on academisation, marked the end of financial support for 'trust' schools and the beginning of difficult times for the Co-operative schools project. The expansion of the Academies programme was intense – suddenly academisation was not simply a solution for failing schools but it also became a highly incentivised option for high-performing schools. Schools falling into both of these categories turned to the Co-operative schools project for a solution and the Co-operative College duly obliged – the Co-operative 'trust' model continued, as an alternative *to* academisation, and a new Co-operative 'converter' academy was developed, as an alternative *within* academisation. The plans for the new Co-operative 'converter' academy were announced in the promotional brochure *Co-operative Schools: Stronger together*,

The co-operative ['converter'] Academy model was developed in partnership with a group of co-operative Trust schools that wanted to pursue academy status in view of the additional freedoms (Co-operative College, 2010:6)

This explanation of the 'converter' academy model reveals the College's ambivalent position, which was keen to demonstrate that the demand for the 'converter' model had come from the schools themselves. Some within the College were uncomfortable about the 'converter' model. It was difficult to square with the 'anti-academy' position of some teaching unions and opened the Co-operative schools project to the wounding criticism that it was merely 'privatisation by nice guys' (Birch, 2012).

There followed a period of intense political wrangling for the Co-operative College, in which it became involved in numerous battles concerning the academisation programme – this, in turn, led to internal confusion and disagreement over the strategy and priorities of the organisation. By the time I arrived at the Co-operative College in 2014, there was a strong

‘anti-academy’ narrative in operation and hardly any mention of the ‘converter’ model. A couple of months in to my project, I was surprised to learn that there were as many as 41 operating ‘converter’ academies – some of these were the ‘flagship’ schools of the Co-operative schools project and their academy status was very much played down. I found this totally confusing. The existence of a Co-operative ‘converter’ model seemed to contradict the narrative of ‘alternative’ and ‘resistance’ that was regularly used at the College and across the literature. As I began to ask about the model, I encountered a spectrum of opinions – ranging from uncertainty, shame, denial and anger. Mike Kerrick explained that he felt confused by the arrival of the ‘converter’ academy model. His account points to the entrenched political ‘battle’ that was running at the Co-operative College against the Academisation programme, and he was unable to see where the ‘converter’ model fit with that,

I’m a little bit cynical about [the ‘converter’] academies – that’s just my view. I mean, for the past 5 or 6 years - however long I have been working on the schools bit - I have always been told that academies are bad, and they are a force of evil, and we must battle them. And then, all of a sudden, y’know, the Education Act changed and there was this gap for where we could include a Co-operative ‘converter’ model ... I am not really sure why you’d choose that route. I also wonder, to a certain extent, whether the [Co-operative] ‘converter’ model was produced as a two-fingers gesture towards Gove. Y’know, if you can’t beat them, join them sort of thing. (Mike Kerrick, Co-operative College, 2014)

In 2014 the official line was that the model had been developed in response to a demand from head teachers, many of them were heads of existing Co-operative ‘trust’ schools, but having been developed it was ‘not promoted’ by the College. There were tensions with the unions – there was an agreement over Co-operative ‘trust’ schools but the Co-operative ‘converter’ model made things more difficult – and, more significantly, there was a strong disagreement at the Co-operative College. Leanne Hamlet explained how the model had been quietly brushed to one side,

After a couple of years of supporting converter academies, whilst we still offer that support service, we aren’t promoting the model. That’s not a policy that’s been agreed, that’s something that’s happened and I think that has been a policy decision by the back door. (Leanne Hamlet, 2014)

The change of emphasis coincided with a staff restructure at the Co-operative College. Strategic disagreements between the ‘in-house’ and ‘external’ teams had continued between 2009-2012 and towards the end of that period, Hammond made the decision to expand John

Spearman's role into the College and give him oversight of the schools work. Leanne Hamlet was assigned with other priorities.

### **False saviours of the academisation programme**

From 2009, John Spearman became an increasingly important figure within the Co-operative schools project. Spearman's local authority background, coupled with his personal politics, meant that he brought a distinct perspective, which recognised that the ground was shifting and saw a particular possibility opening up with the Co-operative 'trust' model. As things progressed, Spearman became much more involved – initially helping to develop the 'trust' model, then project managing conversions and then, in 2012, taking full responsibility for the 'in-house' schools team at the College.

There was a strong feeling, amongst several participants at the Co-operative College and the Co-operative Group, that John Spearman was more committed to resisting the government academisation programme than to idea of Co-operative schools. A manager at the Co-operative Group remembered that the DfE had formally criticised the Co-operative schools project because of suggestions, allegedly made by Spearman, that the Co-operative 'trust' model could 'save' schools from academisation. Speaking in 2014, Spearman explained how he saw the Co-operative 'trust' schools as an alternative to the marketisation and privatisation of the schools sector:

The [Co-operative] College can't be political but we can be philosophical. What worries us mightily is the marketisation and privatisation of education that is currently going on - it is much more pronounced in education than it is in the health service and people don't realise it. Obviously, the market is looking to move in and the local authorities are shrunk ... The [Co-operative] College view of that is that we are opposed to the marketisation and privatisation of education, we are all about mutualisation and about retaining education as a public service, with the ethos of a public service. The particular model that we have got is that these Co-operative 'trusts' will keep the money in the system, any savings made are ploughed back in, not extracted from the system. (John Spearman, 2014)

In the same interview he also shared his opinion of the Co-operative 'converter' school model and the wider Academies programme, which he viewed in very negative political terms:

I am not a big fan of the ['converter'] academy model, I think that there is no such thing as a free lunch and I think that schools need to be warned that in effect they'd be centralised under Secretary of State control ... if people decide that they want to do this, that's their affair. They can convert and they have converted, there is a Coop ['converter'] academy model, but



we would say to people ‘have a care’. But the one that really bothers us is the forced academy model, the so-called ‘sponsored’ academy. Because Gove ain’t getting the numbers of academies that he predicted, particularly in primary, he is using Ofsted as a secret weapon to force schools to become ‘sponsored’ academies which is obviously a hostile take-over model. So those are the ones we worry about, the big chains who are taking over, who are enriching themselves and particularly some of the more sinister ones now who are allied themselves to brother and sister organisations which are selling services to schools. So, we have massive concerns about that. (John Spearman, 2014)

Speaking in 2014, Leanne Hamlet explained that Spearman had had too much influence over the evolving schools work and that Hammond, in particular, had placed too much faith in him. She said, ‘[Robert] had blinkers on. He [thought that John] was a knight in shining armour who had all the answers’. To counter the suggestion that the Co-operative schools project were offering a ‘protection’ against academisation she offered a ‘pragmatic’ account of the way in which some school leaders had adopted the models:

It’s not a protection from academisation at all, but a lot of schools have seen ‘trust’ status ... as way of ensuring that, through mutual support, there is the school improvement there that avoids any of them having to become academies. So for some heads, some governors, in some places, they have seen it as a way of safeguarding. A kind of safeguarding - I mean everyone knows that there is no silver bullet ... Some of them have decided at a later stage to go down the academy route. I don’t think anybody, in any of the Co-operative schools, really thinks that the academy structure is the way that they would like to see schools being run, but there are also people who have taken a pragmatic view and looked at how they might actually creatively use the additional freedoms and the additional finance. (Leanne Hamlet, April 2014)

This section has offered several accounts of the Co-operative schools project in relation to the Academies programme, revealing the tensions and differences of opinion that existed within the Co-operative College.

## **6.4 Co-operation as marketisation: playing a numbers game**

### **A revolution, a movement, a network ... or just a numbers game?**

It was Robert Hammond’s ambition that there would be 1000 Co-operative schools. In fact, due to a combination of rapid growth, hopeful projection and poor record-keeping, accurate data is not available – the highest estimate, and no one is exactly sure where it came from, was of 850 schools. It is possible to track the growth as it is reported in the literature, but numbers are never specific: by 2012 there were ‘around 300’ (Facer et al, 2012), by 2014 there were ‘over 700’ (Woodin, 2015), and in 2015 there were ‘over 850’ (The Co-operative

College, 2015). In June 2016, the current Chair of SCS was clear that this figure was no longer applicable, although he was not able to give an accurate figure,

The 850 - some of those won't be Co-op schools anymore, some of those don't even know that they are Co-op schools - they certainly don't pay a subscription ... if I am honest with you I think that what we have got now is about 350 committed Co-op schools. (Adam Guard, Chair of the Board SCS, June 2016)

In April 2017, the Co-operative College readjusted the current number of Co-operative schools to 600 – it was not clear on what basis this adjustment was made.

What is interesting about these memories, recalled in 2014, is how little Robert Hammond anticipated or even desired the growth that was to come. He remembers,

At that stage, if we [the Co-operative College] had said that we'd got a model that the Business and Enterprise schools would be able to embrace [in order to embed] the values and have that transformation long term, we'd have been happy. If we'd have seen ten or a dozen schools adopt the model most people would have thought that was absolutely fantastic (Robert Hammond, 2014)

When Hammond says 'most people' he means his colleagues in the Co-operative movement, specifically the board at the Co-operative College and the Projects Team at the Co-operative Group. This comment acknowledges that ambitions elsewhere within the movement were more modest. Whilst Hammond was delighted with how far the 'trust' schools exceeded expectations, the Co-operative Group were keen to keep things to a manageable scale and, as the rates of conversion accelerated, tensions began to emerge.

The idea that the Co-operative schools project 'grew topsy' is an interesting one. This is a common expression, from literature<sup>5</sup>, which suggests growth without intention, or control. I want to examine what this might mean in reference to the Co-operative schools project and to explore some of the ways that it can be interpreted. On the one hand, it seems to suggest that the growth of the Co-operative schools project was an organic expansion, independent of external cause. This was a strong narrative at the Co-operative College, with the regular claim that the Co-operative schools project was not promoted or supported. According to this interpretation the idea simply 'took hold' in the schools sector and spread 'by word of mouth'. This idea particularly appeals to those who are keen for the Co-operative schools project to be 'a movement' or representative of 'a revolution'. Linked to this, is the less

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<sup>5</sup> Topsy is a character in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). When asked about God, Topsy replies, 'I s'pect I grewed. Don't think nobody never made me.'

political suggestion that there was a sudden ‘appetite’ for Co-operation within the schools sector and the Co-operative schools project merely tapped into something ‘instinctive’ within the sector. On the other hand, it might suggest that the Co-operative College (and SCS) were entirely unprepared for rapid growth of the Co-operative schools project. This interpretation points to the possibility that there was no real idea about how or why the Co-operative models were popular, and no strategy to support their continuing growth and development.

It is important to note that in 2004, the Specialist Schools programme was a well-resourced New Labour initiative and schools were incentivised to join. From 2008, the New Labour government also incentivised the Trust Schools programme with a £10,000 grant for every converting school. It pledged an additional £5000 to support those schools that had opted to become Co-operative ‘trusts’ and it provided £25,000 to support the start of the SCS. The DCSF produced and circulated a document called *Co-operative Schools - Making a difference* (DCSF, 2009) in which the Co-operative schools project was explicitly promoted and recommended as a pathway for those schools who had been identified as underperforming National Challenge schools – a school improvement initiative which also attracted additional funding. The Co-operative College allocated a large area of their website to promoting the Co-operative schools project. It produced and circulated several promotional booklets and brochures and Robert Hammond gave several interviews to the national press (Mansell, 2011; Birch, 2012).

Mike remembers the beginning of the SCS,

So, what you got was people who wanted to make a difference, and I think that had it been left to work at its own pace we would have achieved great things. The problem was that the [Co-operative] College were on a mission, and their mission wasn’t quality, and it wasn’t anything to do with making good Co-operative schools, or Co-operative schools that even knew what they were doing, or even what they believed in. All they wanted was numbers and it was almost like a bridge too far for them, wasn’t it? They kept pushing and pushing, getting more and more numbers, and we hadn’t got an infrastructure, we couldn’t support it and so there was nobody really training these schools on what it’s all about. So, we were getting more and more people joining, mainly because they didn’t want to be part of something else and they didn’t quite know, or have the belief set, of what they did want. They liked some of what they heard with the Co-operative bit, but they really weren’t ready and they weren’t able to think for themselves, just yet. They may have come along but what they were looking for was a bolthole and they were away. Of course, that flew in the face of what the DfE were trying to achieve, so it brought great conflict between

the DfE and the Co-operative College and that helped nobody. Especially when you've got another three years, as we had then, of the current government. It was a silly fight to pick – you are better off waiting, aren't you, for a better political climate. So, I disagreed with the tactics. Look, the principles are great, I like [Robert Hammond] and [John Spearman] and all the rest of it. What they were trying to achieve is great. But in terms of tactics, strategy, whatever - y'know. I didn't agree. (Mike Carpenter, SCS board member and Principal of Steepston Academy)

This account offers a succinct overview of the issues that were raised across the research. Mike suggests that the strategic disagreements within the Co-operative schools project were significant; he suggests that the 'mission' for numbers, along with drive to resist the Academies programme, created an unsustainable situation and had a negative impact.

This section has taken the themes of alternative, marketisation and resistance and showed how the Co-operative schools project understood itself in relation to these ideas, reflecting the absence of an adequate idea, which led to the muddled architecture and operating strategy of the organisation. In the next section, I turn to a meeting of Regional Managers, which took place at the Co-operative College in May 2014. I include my observations of this meeting in order to complement the interview accounts above and to illustrate the blurred boundaries, confused strategy and mixed messages that were part of the daily routine for those who worked across the Co-operative College and the Schools Co-operative Society. Through my analysis of the meeting, it is possible to see that there was no agreement on the strategy and priorities of the Co-operative schools project. As I consider this evidence I recognised a familiar terrain of contest – the participants of this meeting had no clear idea of the Co-operative schools project - was it an alternative, was it a resistance, or was it, ultimately, just a form of marketisation?

## **6.5 A meeting of multiple hats: Co-operative College and SCS**

In May 2014, I observed a routine meeting of Regional Managers at the Co-operative College (see fig. 6.1 above). Regional Managers were self-employed 'College Associates' with responsibility for the co-ordination and delivery of school conversions in the various regions. At its most basic, this is a process of technical and legal support for schools as they 'convert' their legal status to 'trust' school or 'converter' academy. It is a lengthy process, which involves building a close relationship with the school and supporting the stakeholders through the process of consultation.

The meeting took place at the Co-operative College and, as we gathered in the boardroom, I remember being struck by the demographic of the assembled group. They were men in their

late fifties or early sixties, with long careers in education, local government or not-for-profit organisations - there was at least one former head teacher and a couple of former local authority officers. One of the associates acknowledged that I was the only woman in the room and made an ironic remark about the Co-operative values of 'equality' and 'equity'. The others laughed.

As copies of the agenda were circulated, and introductions (which were for my benefit) got underway, I became aware of a particular phrase, that I saw written on the agenda (see below) and heard being repeated around the table, *'to wear many hats'*.

### **5. SCS & the College; joint working and clarification of respective roles.**

(NB [Jeff Channing] has also asked 'wearing his other hat as regional development manager for SCS', that he'd like to spend 20 mins with Regional Managers for an update/discussion on planning for future regional SCS networks development ... [Rory Wild] has asked for similar ... and [Julia Hide] for [her region]' (Agenda, Regional Managers Meeting, 16th May 2014)

I had not noticed that agenda item 5 promised a 'clarification of respective roles', whilst simultaneously confusing them, and nor did I anticipate this would be a major discussion point of the meeting. As the men introduced themselves, they explained their roles - what they had done in their 'previous life' and, in most cases, with what other things they were currently involved. They said, 'I also wear another hat' and 'I am wearing this hat today but I also...'. It seemed that this small group of men had many hats between them. More hats than heads. Initially, I thought nothing of it. This is a certain type of person, doing a certain type of work, in a certain type of life. People such as these, sit on boards, attend meetings and contribute to panels etcetera. However, as the meeting progressed and moments of profound disagreement were revealed, I noticed that the metaphor of the hats both resurfaced and was sidelined depending on the ebb and flow of the discussion.

When we came to agenda item 5, 'SCS & the College; joint working and clarification of respective roles', it became apparent that there was considerable uncertainty around the role of the SCS and the role of the Co-operative College. Several of the College Associates expressed doubt that adequate 'school improvement' could be delivered through the SCS structure - as was suggested in the promotional literature. Rory Wild explained that in his large region, there were many schools that were not 'getting it' and he suggested that that it might be useful to have sub-regional groups. He explained that he was frustrated about the lack of clarity regarding which organisation (SCS or the Co-operative College) was leading on

school improvement. He explained that he had left a recent SCS meeting with the assumption that SCS and the College would work together on school improvement but then received an email that named Nick Gann as the SCS lead. There followed several allusions to ‘personalities’ and ‘divisions’ and I got the sense that this was an old, and difficult, discussion, which had never been properly resolved. Robert Hammond suggested that the problems could be explained as ‘cock up not conspiracy’ - a phrase that was repeated later, as if in docile agreement, by several others in the room.

Hammond sought to clarify things by reminding colleagues of the College’s role, and suggested that Phil Lincoln, CEO of SCS, was ‘crystal clear’ on what that was,

we [the Co-operative College] help schools establish as Co-operative trusts, we need to fix up a meeting with [Phil Lincoln] to determine, with absolute clarity, the role of SCS. [Phil] is crystal clear that The College is the partner on training and development but there is confusion in [a region] because the SCS dabble in it there. (Robert Hammond, 2014)

At this point, the SCS had been operating, with Phil Lincoln as CEO and the College on the board of SCS, for over four years – the idea that the College simply needed to ‘fix up a meeting’ to iron out the respective roles of the organisations seemed unlikely. The strong assertion that the College was ‘the partner on training and development’ also seemed to contradict the idea that SCS was responsible for school improvement.

Rory Wild and Terry Gowan spoke of the confusion, amongst the schools in their regions, regarding the respective roles of the College and the SCS. Rory said that ‘it didn’t matter how many times’ he explained that the College and the SCS are separate organisations, the schools ‘don’t get it at all’. He had sympathy with their position, explaining that during the conversion process all the contact is with the College and that ‘there is an umbilical cord’. He argued for a ‘joined up approach’ between the Co-operative College and the SCS,

[t]hey sign up, emotionally, as it were, with the ‘Co-operative movement’ and they do not accept that these are different organisations. We need a joined up approach

He shared an email from one head teacher in his region who said he was ‘in despair’ and that other schools in the area ‘feel deserted’ by the Co-operative movement. Rory emphasised the seriousness of the situation and he warned that, ‘this blows back on the College’.

There followed a general acknowledgement that SCS was not, ‘quite yet’, providing the support to schools that they require. Robert Hammond said, ‘hopefully the SCS will grow

from the top, the bottom the side and back the other way'. I found this use of 'hopefully' interesting; it was not clear how this would happen. SCS was established in 2009; the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College were founder members and continued to sit on the board. At the time of this meeting the Co-operative College were continuing to circulate promotional material about SCS (see above), which suggested that it was a support network for schools.

Robert Hammond then moved the meeting along to the next item on the agenda which was the 'troubles at the Group' – referring here to the financial crisis which was uncovered at the Co-operative Bank and the repercussions of that in the mainstream media. He explained that things were in a 'parlous state'. He spoke to the team about the impact of recently published inquiries (Kelly, 2014; Myners, 2014) and the forthcoming Treasury Select Committee Report (House of Commons, 2014), which, he predicted, would be 'absolutely damning of Paul Flowers', former Chairman of the Co-operative bank.

As the meeting continued, there was a strong difference of opinion over how to handle and manage the reputational issues. Rory Wild confirmed that in his region 'the reputational stuff is damaging us' and several of the men around the table felt that the College should put out a strong statement to reassure the schools. Robert Hammond seemed unwilling to take this approach and suggested that there were plans to 'redo the leaflet', making the section on the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative Bank smaller. Jeff Channing favoured tackling the issues head on, he suggested that people preferred to hear the truth and he told the meeting that he had begun all of his recent consultation meetings by addressing the problems at the Co-operative Group. He argued that it was, 'better that it is out there, that we are not in denial' and he was strongly opposed to 'elephant in the room type strategies'. Once again, it appeared that Hammond wanted to move on from this discussion – it was clear that he did not agree with Channing but he did not engage in further discussion of the matter.

He changed the subject, drawing a line under that issue and focusing on what was positive and opportune. He told the team that some 'very interesting opportunities' were occurring in 'the political sphere'. He reported that Meg Munn MP had discussed Co-operative schools in parliament and he described a recent, positive, meeting with Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools. He also relayed 'a positive meeting with a Senior Ofsted Inspector' who was 'interested in exploring ways of evaluating co-operative structures' and who 'got completely' that Co-operative schools were 'part of a self-improving school system'. These announcements were met with a general agreement that

there were ‘very interesting things happening’ but nothing of any substance was shared and there was a sense of frustration that these tales from ‘the political sphere’ were being used as a distraction from other issues.

Towards the end of the meeting, there was a little space where people could air their concerns. However, it seemed, that business was over and there were no solutions or action points. Several consultants hinted that the strategy that had been employed in relation to the Academies programme was in danger of coming unstuck. Rory Wild suggested that, ‘every time a ‘trust’ school gets compulsory conversion when we told them that being a Co-op would offer protection, that’s another nail in the coffin’.

Terry Gowan acknowledged that many schools turned to the Co-operative schools project because of the ‘spectre of academisation’ and he thought that it was vital ‘to keep the momentum going’. He suggested that the ‘real work’ of becoming a Co-operative school begins after conversion and yet many schools feel that they have ‘reached the finishing line when they have converted’. Someone said that ‘there has to be money to allow trusts to develop’ and it was acknowledged (briefly and only by some) that ‘if we don’t evidence school performance, then...’ [it will all be for naught].

There was a difficult atmosphere in the room. Robert Hammond acknowledged that there was a need for ‘serious resources that allows SCS to scale up’. He suggested that it was time to ‘get the wish list ready’ for post-election (when he anticipated a supportive Labour government) and he reminded colleagues that ‘this [the Co-op schools project] has been done without a penny of government money’. This rallying cry from Hammond in the last minutes of this difficult meeting are revealing – he placed the responsibility for the solution with SCS, he hoped for a change of government and he appeared to deny the money that had been available to the Co-operative schools project from 2008-2010.

Several of the men around the table, ‘in role’ as Co-operative College Regional Managers, were able to ‘wear my other hat for a moment’ and speak as board members or associates of the Schools Co-operative Society. This is all very well until it doesn’t suit to wear one or the other hat, because it becomes difficult to do so. Whilst it is certainly possible that important issues can be raised and discussed by the availability of multiple hats around the table, it is also the case that, conversely, a gentle reminder to ‘put the right hat on’ can sideline those issues. It is a curious way to operate. How is it possible to wear ‘two hats’ in a disagreement? How can they be said to adequately address the issues of the other organisation if, when discussion becomes tense or difficult, it is simply left to one side because it is not the



moment for that hat? There was significant tension during this meeting, real disagreements over the way to proceed, and whilst they were somewhat aired they were not discussed or resolved. It seems to me that the wearing of multiple hats and the putting them on and taking them off in an endless round of board meeting musical hats might lead, precisely, to a serpentine situation of ungovernability - where conclusions are hard to reach and courses of action difficult to ascertain.

## Conclusion

The data presented in this chapter reveals the significant tensions within the Co-operative College and also between the Co-operative College and the Schools Co-operative Society. My Spinozist analysis reveals how these tensions were partly due to the absence of a shared, or 'adequate' idea of Co-operative schools and to the lack of an agreed strategy of action. This failure of the key organisations to act co-operatively between themselves and with one another is not only ironic but it also points to significant weakness in transindividual power. The squabbling and in-fighting represents the disagreements of self-interested individuals, which may have been overcome with communication and agreement on the central ideas and strategy of the Co-operative schools project. This emphasis on individual ideas and personal political agendas meant that the Co-operative schools project was drawn into a passive position of resistance and, rather than focusing on ways to build *co-operative power*, energies were wasted elsewhere.

In the following chapter, I present case studies of two Co-operative 'converter' academies in order to show how the vision of the Co-operative schools project was interpreted in the schools sector.

## Chapter 7. Further out in the field: two case studies of Co-operative ‘converter’ Academies

*‘[E]ssence’ does not refer to a general idea of humanity, an abstract concept under which all individuals are subsumed and their differences neutralised. On the contrary it refers to the power that singularises each individual, conferring upon him a unique destiny.*  
(Balibar, 1998:107)

*[O]ur sensibilities link us together in ways that can transform individual affect into shared social values with the potential to enhance human well-being.*  
(Gatens, 2015:13)

### What is the ‘essence’ of the Co-operative academy school?

In this chapter, I present two case studies of Co-operative ‘converter’ academies as examples of the Co-operative schools project in action. This thesis investigates the emergence of the Co-operative schools project by asking what a Co-operative academy *is* and *how* it works. To approach these questions, and to investigate the experiences of those involved, I made research visits to four Co-operative ‘converter’ academies (see Chapter 5). In this chapter, I present two case studies from this phase of the research, which were selected because of their longer relationship with the Co-operative schools project

Steepston Co-operative Academy and Shorebank Co-operative Academy are comprehensive secondary schools with many points of similarity. They each describe themselves as ‘community’ schools, educating local students in areas of low socio-economic advantage. In each case students do not come from a wide catchment area but generally walk to the school, as many of their parents and grandparents did. Each school was described to me as having had a ‘troubled’ past and a historically poor reputation, however both claim to have overcome these local prejudices. Both schools were part of the Specialist Schools Programme, a school improvement initiative which drew upon private sponsorship and government grants to develop co-operation between schools (Bell and West, 2003). Steepston became a performing Arts College in 1998 and Shorebank became a Business and Enterprise College in 2005 (not part of the Co-operative network). In 2008, both schools were identified as under-performing National Challenge schools and faced academisation because of their failure to meet the new minimum standard for student attainment. This was the impetus for both schools as they turned towards the Co-operative ‘trust’ model in 2009/2010.

Across each of the schools there was a strong awareness of the Co-operative values and principles (Appendix A) and an effort to use these to inform pedagogy and practice. In each

school there was a discussion of the tensions and conflicts between a notion of ideal co-operative practice and the demands of the competitive system in which they found themselves – the spectre of school closure and forced academisation was a constant pressure. The purpose of these case studies is to identify the ways in which these schools express their co-operative identity, by exploring their co-operative ethos and practice and by observing how work and learning is helped or hindered by their co-operative status, the co-operative movement and the wider policy context.

The analysis draws upon Spinoza's theory *co-operative power* and seeks to explore the 'essence' of these two schools. O'Donnell (2017) reminds us that, for Spinoza, an essence is not an abstraction but rather 'the acting principle of the thing, that without which the thing cannot be conceived' (pp.3-4). This 'acting principle' is the power to act, the *conatus*. My analysis asks what a Co-operative 'converter' academy school *is* and *how* it works by tracking the *conatus* as it strives to maintain itself, as itself, through multiple relationships both within the school and beyond. Spinoza's concept of *co-operative power*, as transindividuality, allows us to critically interpret and analyse the case study schools, tracing the *conatus* of these emerging co-operative academies as they strive to persist and increase their power to act. For Spinoza, the *conatus* is the power of the individual to strive and persist in being. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) explain how this is a process of becoming, which is connected to 'our pasts and the communities from which we draw our identities', and which also depends upon 'individual and collective responsibility to play an actively critical role in what we will become',

Power (conatus or virtue) is precisely what constitutes the individuality of the self and its strivings. What we are is determined by our pasts and the communities from which we draw our identities. These are the organised wholes through which our powers are enhanced or diminished, and through which the norms which govern our ethical lives are generated. However, what we will become depends, in part, on the vicissitudes of our conatus, the means through which we strive to understand who and what we are. For Spinoza, this is the extent of our freedom and it includes the individual and collective responsibility to play an actively critical role in what we will become (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999:134–135)

This passage acts as a significant guide as we consider the *co-operative power* of the schools in this study. In order to understand the *conatus* of these case study schools it is necessary to attend to their 'pasts' and their 'communities', and to consider the other 'organised wholes' through which their powers are increased and decreased – such as, for example, the wider context of political reform and the intensification of the standards agenda. It is also crucial to

attend to the dynamic and active processes through which they understand themselves and their becoming.

I begin by describing their context and story, and go on to discuss in more detail observation and interview data collected during the research visits. By looking closely at the interview data, I show how Spinoza helps critique but also helps affirm alternative ways of pursuing a co-operative agenda. Discussion of the data is included in each section, so as to offer a fluid approach to data analysis that allows me to thread the theory into these case study accounts.

## 7.1 Steepston Co-operative Academy

In 1984, Steepston Comprehensive School was purpose-built as part of a significant reorganisation and modernisation programme in the City of Strandgate. Since the 1980s, it has reinvented itself many times, responding to successive education reform with a mixture of necessity and imagination. As the new education market expanded, and performance pressures intensified, Steepston used the external changes, welcome or otherwise, to inspire internal transformation and develop a strong ethos across the school. Steepston became a Co-operative trust school in 2009 and converted to Co-operative ‘converter’ academy status in 2011. Its local circumstances are such that it is likely to remain a school that is called upon to innovate and improve. Situated in a ‘low-wage, high welfare’ coastal city (Cities Outlook, 2016), the school serves a community that can, in part, be defined in terms of its socio-economic deprivation.

### Steepston’s *conatus*: ‘dynamic self-preservation’

Principal, Mike Carpenter, a passionate advocate for equality and democracy in education, emphasised the complex socio-economic context of the school and the negative effect of selection in the wider authority. He described Steepston as a ‘constrained’ school (Lightman, 2010), which is unfairly served in a system of top-down targets and regulatory performance assessment,

There are ‘confident’ schools and there are ‘constrained’ schools. The confident schools sit on able populations, in middle class areas and attract well-fed children, who are well looked after with all the usual parental backing, and they do really well. They can take risks because their children will rock up and no matter what they do, they will always do very well in public examinations ... The constrained schools, schools like us, can’t ... [take risks] because someone comes in and inspects the hell out of us. They are looking for why we don’t achieve at above national average. They don’t see the fact that [we’re in] a selective authority [with] white working-class

children etcetera, etcetera. They assume everything is the fault [of poor teaching/leadership] (Principal)

He was critical of the narrow standards agenda, which takes no account of Steepston's local circumstances, and the punitive inspection framework, 'which inspects the hell out of us'. In describing the school as 'constrained' and expressing his frustration that Steepston is not free to 'take risks' he revealed an interesting tension within the school. In fact, as this case study will demonstrate, Steepston works hard to express its *co-operative power* with a blend of creativity, experiment, and risk-taking. However, it is simultaneously 'constrained' and, as it acts amidst multiple tensions, it suffers the contradictions of the wider system. Mike described this situation in terms of oppositional forces,

There is no escaping performativity and market forces and those things that are totally alien to what we are *trying to achieve* as a Co-operative school. It's almost as if we are part of a resistance movement, an underground movement, *trying to survive* in impossible times (Principal)

Here Mike's language is revealing, whilst he described the dominant agenda as 'totally alien' and the external circumstances as 'impossible' there is a sense in which there is a continual effort towards 'trying to achieve' and 'trying to survive' *otherwise*. Mike used the language of resistance, but there is no sense of stasis, rather an active determination to keep 'trying'. This active response is crucial as we begin to work with Spinoza's concept of *conatus*. Instead of passively responding to, and reproducing, the static identity of the standards agenda, Steepston strives to articulate its own dynamic identity, which is based upon democracy and co-operation. Mike explained that, at Steepston, they were 'trying to do things the long and hard way, to dig in with really good quality co-operative learning'. So, we can begin to see that the question is not merely one of survival and resistance, although these are constant factors, but also of 'dynamic self-preservation' (Duffy, 2010:154). Spinoza tells us that the *conatus* is not simply a preservation of one's current capacities but also always entails a dynamic relationship to the future and a determination to increase one's power to act through collective relations.

### **A shared story: 'everyone works together'**

One of the ways that Steepston manages to navigate through the external and internal challenges and aspirations is through the creation of a strong co-operative narrative, which seemed to invigorate the school. There was a co-operative 'story' told at Steepston, a positive co-operative energy, which was reinforced through phrases such as: 'for the greater good', 'leaving a legacy', 'more than just us', and 'we instead of me'. These phrases were not

passively displayed in the reception area, or on the website, but were actively spoken by staff and students and repeated across several interviews. I found this use of language and narrative compelling, and I saw how it worked to create an authentic sense of co-operative endeavour across the school. James (2010) suggests that narrative is an important resource for the *conatus* and that communities construct narratives in order achieve their shared goals and overcome the inevitable conflicts and disagreements (EIVP32). At Steepston I observed that the co-operative narrative was both productive and unifying. Mike mobilised this co-operative narrative when he explained that the Co-operative model offered ‘a values-driven sense of where we were going and who we were’. Using the symbolism of the ‘totem pole’ he described the way that the values and principles of the Co-operative movement became a narrative focal point, which contributed to a sense of purpose and trust, within the school community,

Every time we have had difficult decisions to make, we have gathered around the values like the American Indians would gather round a totem pole. It has become something that people now believe in and trust the leadership to deliver on  
(Principal)

I found it impossible to ignore the story of shared endeavour that was told at Steepston. Students and staff explained that they felt part of a common community, which was ‘working together’ to achieve its shared goals. One student described it like this:

Everyone works together. You are not *striving* for yourself exactly, you are *striving* to work and help others as well, not just you. You help others instead of doing it by yourself and [Steepston] is centred around that. As much as you are working for yourself you are also trying to help everybody. So, in class we will do a certain amount of single work but we will work as a team as well (Student, Y9)

Whilst it is tempting to focus only on the language of ‘striving’ that is used here, which, in corresponding to Curley’s (1988) translation of Spinoza’s *conatus*, gives a perfect account of Steepston’s *conatus* in action, this testimony also reveals the way in which the narrative of the school is ‘centred around’ the idea that ‘everyone works together’. It is important to notice that as the student talked about her experience of Steepston, she naturally turned to an example of classroom practice, using this to describe how the students both work for themselves and ‘work as a team’. Here the student was referring to the Kagan (2001) co-operative learning programme, a commercially available resource with an emphasis on democratic practice. Steepston adopted this approach when it became a Co-operative ‘trust’ school in 2009 because, as one teacher explained, ‘it embodies the values that we [wanted] to develop’ (English teacher). Whilst the Kagan learning programme is integral to Steepston’s

teaching and learning method it is but one aspect of a much wider co-operative pedagogy, which includes school organisation and structure, and is expressed neatly in the operating philosophy of ‘everyone works together’.

### **Transindividual pedagogy: increasing the power of all**

Whilst Steepston became a Co-operative school in 2009, several members of staff (including some who were former students) explained that the values and principles of the Co-operative movement offered a new articulation of an existing ethos. Mike Carpenter agreed that the co-operative transformation of Steepston began with the Specialist Schools Programme, a well-resourced government initiative, which Steepston joined in 1998. The school used the additional finance (a mixture of private investment and government grant) to develop a transformative ‘architecture of co-operation’ (Sennett, 2013), which remains in place today and offers two pillars of support to the current Co-operative ethos of the school.

The first aspect was the introduction of an innovative ‘guild system’ for pastoral care. This was a vertical structure of five ‘guilds’, with a subject specialism as their focus. Students chose their preferred specialism e.g. arts, languages, science, sports or technology and were supported to spend two morning sessions a week developing expertise in an area of personal interest. One teacher explained that the idea was ‘to start [the students] with something that they really want to do in the morning, to get them excited about learning’. Other mornings were dedicated to pastoral care and academic support, including a regular ‘circle-time’ session. I observed one session on ‘responsibilities beyond school’, which included caring for others, domestic chores, voluntary work and paid employment. The students shared their experiences and were encouraged to comment and reflect on the conversation. I saw how the vertical structure helped students to build relationships by providing a supportive, mixed-aged environment, with democratic opportunities for students to act as mentors and role-models. During interviews, both staff and students described the school in terms of ‘a family’ where ‘we all belong’. A student explained how this sense of relationship and co-operation is linked to the structure of the school,

If you go to other schools you see that their tutor [groups] are separated into year groups ... whereas [in our tutor groups] we have got people from [all the] different years and we communicate together, like a small family. We are a big family if you take all of us. We just co-operate with each other (Student, Y10)

The second aspect was the adoption of a ‘theatre paradigm’ as a pedagogical mechanism for creating the ‘everyone works together’ ethos that permeates school. Here the students were encouraged to think about themselves as an important part of everyday performance, where

everyone has a role to play, and all depend on each other to achieve overall success. Mike saw this as a way to create a positive ethos across the school. He and his team used it to raise expectations by emphasising the imperatives of theatre performance: self-discipline, motivation, high-expectation, unity of purpose and constant dialogue. One teacher described how the individual and the collective come together in the theatre paradigm:

[The theatre paradigm is] everybody valuing each other and looking after each other, everybody taking their own responsibility, meeting deadlines, being on time etcetera. ... Individually you have to know your lines, but you have also got to work as a group. You have to turn up on time for the performances. You can't be late, you can't miss your cue, you can't not be on stage (Teacher)

Sennett (2013) uses the example of an orchestra to make a connection between the art of co-operation and the collective practice and performance of music. Similarly, it is possible to see how the long-established 'working together' ethos of the theatre paradigm at Steepston, with its emphasis on self-responsibility and solidarity, has underpinned the recent transition to the formalised principles and values of the Co-operative movement. As I make these connections, it is also fruitful to explore those that exist between the idea of a pedagogical 'theatre paradigm' and Spinoza's co-operation. Rovere (2017) identifies how theatre, as 'a collective practice of feeling and thinking' (p.2), played a significant role in the education offered to Spinoza by his own teacher Van den Enden. Rovere is persuasive when she suggests a link between theatre as a pedagogical tool, where the student learns through the body, performing and incorporating the lesson, and the politics of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Rovere describes this paradigm in much the same way as it was explained to me at Steepston: no student works in isolation, there is a clear goal of performance, there is the unity of the play and all must participate (p.8). Rovere draws upon Spinoza's idea of the 'immanent collective body' (p.8) whereupon learning through the theatre paradigm becomes a collective experience, the students experience themselves as a collective in which they are performing. Such learning is experiential and embodied, and students learn as much about complementarity as they do about difference. Rovere argues that through the 'emotional methods' (p.1) of a theatre pedagogy there is less emphasis upon teaching as transmission, translation and explanation - the student and teacher are learning together and overcoming the hierarchy and problematics of the 'expert professor' (p.8). This is exactly the approach that I saw in action at Steepston, occurring across a rich co-operative pedagogy, the essence of which is: 'everyone works together'. This ethos was initially founded through the 'theatre paradigm' and has been expanded over 20 years of co-operative practice to include: vertical



and democratic organisation, Kagan learning, student choice and personalisation, and myriad opportunities to communicate and build relationships with others.

O'Donnell (2017) suggests that Spinoza's philosophy allows us to 'shift discourses and frameworks' (p.2) in educational practice, towards pedagogies of 'experimentation' (p.2). I argue that, through its commitment to a rich co-operative pedagogy, Steepston is engaged in processes of 'experimentation' that serve to animate the idea of transindividuality, which I presented in Chapter 4 of this thesis. These co-operative approaches explicitly encourage the students to think of themselves, simultaneously, as collective and as individualised learners and thus we can begin to see how a co-operative pedagogy reveals the transindividuality that Balibar (1997) identifies in Spinoza's collective individual. O'Donnell (2017) suggests the collective depends upon the 'singularity' (p.5) of learners who, through practices of communication and co-operation, develop a 'growing awareness' of themselves as connected and interdependent. I suggest that the co-operative pedagogy at Steepston works to 'sensibilise' (p.9) the students, through processes of transindividuality, as individual learners who are part of a collective. Gatens and Lloyd (1999) remind us that, for Spinoza, 'virtuous politics' (p.120):

are those which combine the powers of many harmoniously and so constitute a body politic capable of functioning as if it were '*one mind and one body*' (EIVP18S3) (p.120)

As the students participate in the pedagogy of co-operation at Steepston so they become aware of their 'causal context' (p.120) and increasingly find themselves 'in harmony' with the collective, a harmony, or an 'agreement in power' (p.120), which is fundamental to the accomplishment of the 'virtuous collective body' (p.120). Through this analysis it is possible to understand Steepston's *co-operative power* is its co-operative pedagogy, which is: 'everybody works together'. The purpose of this co-operative pedagogy is to increase the power of the school community, the co-operative and democratic process have been designed to 'promote the freedom of each' and 'increase the power of all' (p.119)

### **Steepston constrained: 'there's no escaping performativity'**

The examples above illustrate the creative pedagogical approach that I saw at Steepston, and my analysis shows how this draws upon the Spinozist idea of the *transindividual* and works to augment the *co-operative power* of the school. However, as indicated in the introduction, the senior leadership team feel simultaneously unable to 'take risks' and interpret the school as 'constrained' within the context of the performativity and standards agenda. In this section,

my analysis will turn to these constraints and consider how these deny or negate the transindividual and thus serve to diminish Steepston's *co-operative power*.

When Mike said, 'there's no escaping performativity' he was referring to the multiple processes of accountability and tracking, which are administered through 'school league tables' and the Ofsted inspection programme (see Chapter 2). A significant area of tension and compromise has been on the strategy for examination entry and preparation, which links to the wider context of performativity. The idea of educating the whole child as opposed to merely focusing on their attainment data was raised across several interviews, with the specific idea of the 'exam factory' positioned as an unthinkable extreme. This widespread concern that the school should not become an 'exam factory' suggests that it seems like a real possibility. One senior leader admits,

it would be very easy to see [the students] all on a giant spreadsheet - you know, they are green they are on target, red they are not quite yet. But, actually, it's a young person that you are dealing with and being part of a Co-operative school is what we remember and it's all centred around the values (Andrea, Assistant Principal)

Mike insisted, 'we have never cheated, we have refused to game the system' but he did admit that it was getting harder to act with integrity. He told me that, 'we will be closed if we can't compete on progress and achievement in English'.

'We talk about producing well-rounded individuals. We are not an exam factory ... We really care about what that young person will become. We want to make sure that they leave here as someone who will cope in the world of work. As someone who is resilient, somebody who can run their own household, somebody who can manage a budget, somebody who has got the people skills and the sense to care for others. Somebody who is a genuinely nice person (Paula, Assistant Principal)

Whilst Steepston was trying to resist 'the exam factory tendency' (teacher) it was clear that it was increasingly difficult to do so. Several teachers expressed unease about the diagnostic and strategic approach to exam preparation that had developed through work with Challenge Partners<sup>6</sup> and PiXL Club<sup>7</sup>. As Mike discusses the relationship with these external school improvement agencies he is critical of the lack of support from the Co-operative movement.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.challengepartners.org/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pixl.org.uk/>

He suggests that, in terms of resources and strategy, it has been 'way off the pace' in comparison to other providers in the sector.

The Co-operative College ... are doing it on half a sixpence and ... consequently aren't moving quick enough. [They] don't know what our expertise is and don't know what we're trying to achieve (Principal)

My research reveals that Steepston does not understand itself rigidly as 'a' Co-operative school but rather sees itself as a school with a co-operative ethos. The ethos of the school and the priority of 'working together' began in 1998 with the theatre paradigm and the Specialist Schools investment and has more recently been understood in terms of the ethics and values of the Co-operative movement. The IT manager, expresses the long history when he says,

I think things have been 'formalised' under the new co-operative academy structure. [Through] formally becoming a co-operative school and having a set of values, they are more widely understood now ... But I think that's been built gradually over a long time, over the last twenty years, to the point where it is formal and we can recognise it ... You don't just become a co-operative school. Any school that thinks that you can just become a co-operative school today and have a co-operative ethos throughout the place [is mistaken]. They can begin to put things in place, but they won't be a fully co-operative school for a long time. Because it takes a lot of time and it's built on a foundation of change, and learning together, and working together, to achieve something more. And it's really hard work but there's recognition that everyone is doing the same. Everyone is going to be working just as hard as everyone else, to achieve that goal. Which is then better for everybody (IT Manager and former student)

Here the suggestion that Steepston was built on a 'foundation of change' reveals the dynamic and responsive way that the school understood itself and its values. The few days that I spent at Steepston perfectly encapsulated the distinction between the 'static' co-operative ideal of the Co-operative movement and 'dynamic' co-operative practice that Spinoza advocates, revealing this as a continual tension. At Steepston the co-operative ethos is not a static ideal but a continually dynamic practice of consensus and relationship. Mike Carpenter draws inspiration from the origins of the co-operative movement in 1844 and sums up the contemporary challenge when he says,

Toad Lane is a great story but it is a 19th century market story based on the Industrial Revolution and how the people of Rochdale made sense of it at the time. What we have got to make sense of is a very different world, in a particular education

system ... that is very competitive and very based on, really, anti-co-operative principles. (Principal)

In March 2017, Steepston Co-operative Academy received a Category 3 Ofsted judgment of 'Requires Improvement'. Whilst this does not place the school at immediate risk of closure it does mean that pressure to improve on progress and achievement will intensify in an environment of increased scrutiny and surveillance. In such circumstances it is probable that there will be further compromises to the co-operative ethos of this 'constrained' school.

## **7.2 Shorebank Community College**

### **Introducing Shorebank Community College (formerly Riverton School)**

In 1967 Prime Minister Harold Wilson visited the thriving mining community of Riverton to cut the ribbon on the first purpose-built comprehensive school in the area. The new school represented a radical shift in national education policy and promised to provide local working-class children with 'the widest possible range of courses in the most modern of buildings' (local newspaper, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1965). However, by the late 1980s this auspicious beginning was forgotten. The mine closed in 1985 and, in the years that followed, the community endured significant economic and social decline. As local families experienced long-term unemployment and poverty, the reputation of Riverton School also suffered. One teacher, a former pupil, remembered that the school had 'a very notorious name' and another teacher, who also came from the community, complained that the poor reputation of the 1980s 'stuck to us like mud and we couldn't get it off'.

During my visit, it was clear that the fortunes of the school had begun to shift and, although it remained vulnerable in terms of its performance against national averages, its local standing was improving. The staff and students with whom I spoke were proud of their school and there was a general feeling that things had changed for the better. One pastoral leader was enthusiastic about what they had achieved and explained that the school had 'come on absolutely leaps and bounds'. The school's Co-operative ethos was seen as integral to this development and whilst considerable socio-economic challenges persisted there was a strong belief amongst the staff that Co-operation offered a positive pathway for school improvement. The deputy head teacher explained that although the school 'lives with the legacy' of the pit closure he believed that a Co-operative approach offered a 'sustainable, long-term' method for transformation in the community.

The school's senior leadership team have endeavoured to respond to national reform initiatives with local integrity. In 2008, the school was designated as a 'failing' National

Challenge school and was threatened with closure. The local authority came under pressure to pursue a private partnership solution and were keen to find an academy sponsor for the school. The school resisted this route and preferred to pursue the option of a new building under New Labour's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme (Mahony et al., 2011). In January 2009 the school moved out of the 'concrete jungle' that was the 1960s building and into 'state of the art' facilities financed under a £23m private finance initiative (PFI). The new building prompted the school to change its name and give the students a new uniform – Shorebank Community College was born and the deputy head explained, 'it was a new start that would allow us to make a sea change'.

Whilst the new school provided the opportunity to look forwards to a brighter future, the pressure to academise remained and intensified. Staff were concerned that the school would lose its independence if it were to become 'sponsored' by an academy chain and, in an effort to resist this outcome, the school became a Co-operative foundation trust in 2010. This turned out to be a temporary solution, which allowed the school to stay within the local authority whilst it began to develop Co-operative approaches. However, by 2013 the Academies programme had dramatically expanded and the local authority was unable to support its remaining schools - Shorebank decided to become a Co-operative 'converter' academy. The deputy head explained how they saw this as a way of achieving a sense of independence through connection to a larger network,

We wanted to be ourselves, our own Co-operative, and to be unique - that was one of the appeals of the Co-operative [model]. But we also wanted to join a larger organisation, that had a larger voice, and also had that element of support and challenge that went with being part of a larger organisation (Deputy head teacher)

The school was excited by the promise of the Co-operative schools project. It worked hard to embrace the Co-operative academy model and embed a values-based approach across the school. Internally, it had begun to develop a Co-operative pedagogy, which included a vertical pastoral system and use of the Kagan learning programme. It also established a stakeholder 'forum' and worked to develop its member constituencies. Externally, it had tried to build strength by contributing to a regional network of Co-operative schools and by increasing its commitment to the local community. The deputy head explained that the school saw 'community involvement as a path to improving achievement' at the school. My analysis shows how Shorebank's connection to its local community is a vital transindividual mechanism through which Co-operative practice began to flourish. Many current parents and staff were themselves educated at the school and the school positioned the Redbrick

Centre (an on-site community centre) as a dedicated resource, which provided rich opportunities for the school to integrate more fully with the community.

However, despite these positive changes the future of the school was, once again, in doubt – in January 2015 the academy received an Ofsted judgment of ‘inadequate’. The report described Shorebank as a school with ‘serious weaknesses’, particularly in terms of the quality of teaching and pupil achievement, which it was called upon to ‘rapidly improve’. This judgment put Shorebank ‘in category’, which meant that progress would be closely monitored by follow-up inspections. During the week of my visit in April 2015 there was a follow-up ‘short notice inspection’, which found that these improvements were not happening quickly enough. Thus, at the time of this research, the school was under significant pressure. There was a demand for rigorous improvement, the leadership team were exploring multiple options for development, and there existed significant uncertainty about the future of the academy. Staff and students were deeply disappointed by the Ofsted judgement; they felt that it did not account for the progress that had been made across the school. One student complained,

Ofsted only came for two days and they haven’t really seen what we are - as in like we work with the community, with teachers, parents, with all of the people around us and we think that we have a lot going for us (Y9 Student)

There was a deep conviction that the Co-operative identity was integral to the school and a firm belief that it had brought positive value to the school community. Several staff expressed concern about the future of Co-operative status and anxiety about what would be lost if the school was forced to abandon the Co-operative approach. One member of staff explained,

I can see how the Co-op makes a real difference to us and it makes a massive difference to us as a school - it is our identity. I am very concerned that that identity could go if we are forced ... down a different path ... I just think that it is what makes our school (Staff member)

However, at a senior level there was criticism of the Co-operative schools project, including frustration with regard to the absence of a strategy for development and a concern about the lack of capacity and expertise. There were particular doubts about the capacity of the Co-operative approach to respond to the demands of HMI. Head teacher, Steve Bench, acknowledged the requirement to ‘accelerate the pace of change’ along with the need ‘to be a little more ruthless in terms of moving staff forward’ and, whilst he recognised the appeal of

the Co-operative approach within the school, he admitted that it was under significant pressure. He explained,

It's a massive challenge to move a school like this. We will do it ... but, ultimately, can we do it on our own? It's hard. It's tough. Can the Co-op organisation give [us] the support that [we] really need? I don't think so, not in its current structure. That's my view. And yet, I am passionate about the values of it and what we have tried to set up and do in developing the [RVCLP] partnership. But now – y'know (Steve Bench, head teacher).

The deputy head and the staff body remained committed to the 'long-term and sustainable' potential of Co-operative development; however, the head teacher accepted that this pathway was no longer open to them. The school needed to demonstrate swifter improvement and the head teacher acknowledged that they needed to be sponsored by an organisation with the capacity and the expertise to support them.

Shorebank was unable to respond to the demand for rapid improvement and maintain its Co-operative identity. On the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 Shorebank Community College closed and reopened as a 'sponsored' academy within Beerby Learning Trust, a local multi-academy trust that is unconnected to the Co-operative schools project.

### **Ideals and values**

The school wholeheartedly embraced the values of the Co-operative movement and there was a sense in which they were grasped as a lifeline. The school had a troubled past – they spoke of a broken community and a history of failed relationships, which led to a collective sense of abandonment and low-self-esteem. The move to the new building and the adoption of the Co-operative ethos were beginning to change that perception from the inside out. Staff and students felt connected to each other and to their local community. They did feel stronger, but they were not yet strong enough to be operating alone and without support.

A sense of Co-operative community was palpable in conversation with both the staff and the student focus groups. The school was structured using a 'house system' with 'vertical tutor groups', drawn from student in years 7 to 11. The students valued this structure; when asked to describe their school the students repeatedly used the word 'family' and it seemed that they drew a sense of safety and belonging from the pastoral groupings. One student felt that vertical tutor groups were positive because,

'...you get to communicate with other year groups, to see how they are doing...communication is vital because when you are communicating with someone

it's like you are talking to that person, it's like you are not scared, it's like you can freely go up to each other and talk' (Year 9 Student)

Another student described the sense of equality that she felt permeated the school and the feeling of happiness that she drew from this atmosphere of connection,

'All the staff treat you with respect - there is equality. It's like one big happy family' (Year 8 Student)

A member of staff explained how the Ofsted judgement was received within the school,

When we changed from year groups to the vertical tutoring there were lots of doubts - from students, and from staff, and from parents. But I saw that transition very early on, probably in the first six months, where all these students in these form groups were becoming their own little families ... One of the students said to me when we had the Ofsted report, 'It's cruel, miss, because it's like ripping the heart of our family' ... She wrote a little bit about it, saying this is our community, this is our family, and being told that we are a rubbish family hurts. And it does hurt. She even said that the changes that have been made over the last five years have moved us in the right direction. So [the students] are finding difficult to understand. If things are better in school - the behaviour is better, kids around school are better - why is it that something is not quite right? Cos it feels better. I don't know if it's that the goals are being moved or maybe the teaching does need to be a little bit more exciting. But when I walk round school, the classes are fantastic, the teaching staff that I know are fantastic teachers and it's a shame (Pastoral leader)

The head teacher explained how the school embraced the Co-operative ethos,

When you walk into this school it smacks you in the face. The moment you drive in through the gate [you see] "Co-operative academy". [We have the] Co-operative values blasted on walls and in the department areas. There is an ethos ... And there is a danger that we are going to lose it – that's the problem. The trouble is, is that it's not getting the outcomes (Steve Bench, head teacher)

One staff member spoke passionately about the strength of Co-operation in the school and the sense of contradiction that she saw between that and the performance and accountability measures,

I think that we are very Co-operative, we truly do believe in the values right across the school and we do implement them, so we use the values, they are everywhere round the school - our students understand it completely, they get what it is. It's integral to what we do. It's a really supportive happy school, where the children are empowered in a way to be happy and to get involved in all the things that are going on. They are so confident and they will tell you about their own confidence and how it has grown since they have been here ... I know that we've had a little bit of a kicking from everybody in the world but, underlying that, our kids are happy. They behave well, they are happy, and that's really important. They will tell you that they are fulfilled and its outside the grading structure, outside the exams. That aside they will tell you, 'we really like it here'. We have just done the interviews with them for a



talking prospectus - they were absolutely amazing. It was all about confidence and support and the caring community (staff member)

### **Affect: fear, hope**

The school resisted the academisation programme; they were frightened about being 'gobbled up' and losing their identity and they were hopeful that the Co-operative movement offered a compromise. The staff at Shorebank were fearful of the Academies programme, they were keen to maintain their identity and resisted 'sponsorship' by an external organisation,

[L]ots of the sponsorship chains seemed to be gobbling [schools] up and subsuming them and we believed that we offered something special and something different. It was the previous head who put that at the heart of it, she didn't want to lose the individuality of the school or indeed the school's independence or [connection to] its community. (Deputy head teacher).

The school felt that the Co-operative model offered them an alternative route, which would allow them to have independence but still receive the support of an external organisation. The deputy head explained how the Co-operative model appeared to offer hope for the future,

[T]he Co-operative model offered a compromise, it seemed to offer the best of both worlds ... [T]he school was linked to its community by the structure and the school was linked to an organisation that was values-driven, with a longstanding experience of being values-driven. Whereas the chains were all new and short-term ... the Co-op seemed to offer us something different ... When we had actually made all of these decisions in the end, I think that we were actually very happy with where we were going because we believed that we were keeping our independence, within a values-driven organisation, and that the future looked better. So, as we set off on the journey everything seemed to be much better. (Deputy head teacher)

### **Practice & Pedagogy**

Despite its relatively weak starting point, Shorebank invested a great deal in developing its co-operative practice. My analysis reveals that it sought to develop a 'relational ontology' both internally and externally and this 'transindividual' relationship building was at the heart of its strategy and the source of the success that it was beginning to experience – building strength through connections with others.

Shorebank was deeply connected to the community which it served. These connections were both personal and historical, in that the school has educated the local people for several generations. The school employed a dedicated Community Officer who explained that his

role was, 'to help grow the co-operativeness of the school' by forging partnerships between the schools and the community. He explained how he saw this as a two-way process,

to grow the interaction of the community into the school building itself and then, likewise, to get the children out of school and into the community ... My job is to get these relationships flourishing in school so that it's a non-dependent relationship.  
(Bill Rose, Community Officer)

I want to suggest that Bill recognised the transindividual power of the school-community relationship. He suggested that the path to school improvement was closely linked to the co-operative partnerships with the local community, and he had a long-term, sustainable vision for that improvement, which was not simply about 'ticking boxes' but about making improvements over time and building the capacity within the school and the community,

So [the focus] is to move this school out of a category and to become outstanding and that is the clear goal. So all the Co-operation, and all the work that I do, is to help the school to do that. [To] improve teaching and learning, [to] improve the quality of teaching over time, but also to build the capacity within the school itself. That's where the Co-operative values come in, so working with all these partnerships, it's not just to get a specialist in for a couple of weeks who can help us tick some boxes, it's about the school and the staff building their capacity so that they can tick the boxes themselves. (Bill Rose, Community Officer)

Bill believed that building good relationships with the local community was vital to the long-term success of the school. He recalled the poor reputation of the former school and acknowledged that the parents and grandparents of current students 'had a really bad experience of school life', he saw it as one of the important tasks of the school to 'change their mentality to help their children do better than they did'. He explained,

One of the projects that we are looking at, at the moment, is how can we develop community learning - so mum and dad come to the Redbrick Centre to get their maths and English they can then help [their children] at school ... So, it's building all that groundwork so that the community have got a better outlook on education and learning at home, which underpins the future of the school. So, it's not just about today, it's about tomorrow. We have got to look in ten years time - when these children leave school are they going to be in a position to help with homework and keep the pace of the school going because the capacity of the community itself helps the school to get where it need to be as well. We need to instil it in the community now. (Bill Rose, Community Officer)

Shorebank was proactive in the development of the Riverton Valley Co-operative Learning Partnership (RVCLP), a regional network of Co-operative schools. When the legal process of academy conversion was complete they were unsure of the next step. The school felt isolated

and staff described how, from a place of necessity, they sought to network with other Co-operative schools,

When we became an academy, we didn't have any structure. We were given the model but we were like: 'What does that mean?' I think, because we worked through it and we talk about it a lot, and we are really committed to it, we suddenly thought, 'Y'know what, it would be really helpful if we could help other people and they could help us'. But there was nobody and so [we decided to] form our own little self-help group. So, particularly for us in [Riverton], we were pretty isolated. There was only one other Co-op school at that time and they were miles away from us ... So, at that point, we literally needed to phone a friend, we had no one. The LA had washed their hands of us, we didn't have anywhere to go, so we were like: 'We have got to self-help, we really, truly have got to self-help!' And so that was part of our driving force - it was selfish in a way, because we needed the help and we felt really strongly that there were people out there who had good practice that we wanted to tap into, and equally we are very happy to share anything that we have learned along the way. That was really where it began, it was kind of about us but also, if we were truly Co-operative, then we had to offer up our good practice and our help and our support to other people - and that's what we did. [Riverton Valley Co-operative Learning Partnership] grew out of that really (Staff member)

By the time of my visit, the RVCLP was a fairly buoyant network with forty-three member schools contributing to regular meetings and an annual conference. The deputy head teacher explained that Shorebank's involvement in the development of the network had been motivated by self-interest. The school was weak and isolated, internally they did not have the expertise that they required and they recognised that they needed the support of others. It was a risk for the school, they did not have very much internal capacity, but they felt that it was imperative to get an external network going,

We wanted to help forge and shape it ... we wanted it, when it existed, to be the resource that didn't exist. And it involved us in more work that we would have liked it to have done because there has been no help from anyone else [Deputy head teacher]

The issue of the RVCLP is interesting – there was no extant Co-operative network and they worked with others to create one. They did not expect the Co-operative movement to 'come over the hill and save them', instead they assumed their co-operative 'self-responsibility' and sought to 'self-help' by building a network around them. Unfortunately, in this case, the strategy was not appropriate. The head teacher acknowledged the effort that the school made to build a Co-operative network but he did not think that there was the potential to drive the

kind of radical improvements that were necessary as Shorebank strived to ‘get out of category’,

We always knew that, the principles of the Co-operative are about self-help and self-responsibility, and it’s about people working together and offering that self-help. But, of course the accountability measures that we are under from DFE and Ofsted don’t work in that way ... If I rang up the head at [school] and said, ‘right listen, we have gone into a category and I need your help. You need to be accountable for our outcomes’ I think she’d say, ‘No thanks, I’ve got my own school to sort out’ [Head teacher].

### Experience of the Co-operative schools project

The senior leadership team were critical of the Co-operative schools project. Shorebank was committed to developing a Co-operative approach and followed all the guidance that was available as it worked to develop structures and practices of Co-operation – but it found the project lacking. The school leadership team were surprised to find that there was no strategy for development offered by the Co-operative College and the Schools Co-operative Society and they were disappointed by the lack of capacity,

It was very bold idea. It was a fantastic concept. A lot of the initial work and structures were absolutely great and the people who were working on it were really very, very visionary. In my opinion, however, they didn’t anticipate what they would do once they had got the movement going ... some national and regional support and structure was needed and that simply wasn’t put in ... to some extent I think that they actually thought that it existed, because on paper it seemed to suggest that it did. But it soon became clear - very soon it became clear that there wasn’t anything. Which is why, as a school, we threw ourselves wholeheartedly ... into the creation of the RVCLP (deputy head teacher)

They believed that the Co-operative vision was right for education and the deputy head teacher maintained a hopeful commitment to the ‘Co-operative way’. The head teacher was less convinced. They felt that they had been misled about the capacity of the Co-operative schools network,

I would have liked SCS and/or the [Co-operative] College to have given some shape to what it really believes in ... I don’t think that that is very difficult and I don’t understand why it wasn’t done. All the start-up stuff is absolutely fantastic ... But then, for some reason that eludes me, it was, ‘well, that’s it - over to you - go off into this brave new world’ (that no one really knows what it is). But I would have thought that it was really rather obvious that you have to have a strategy. Perhaps there comes a stage where you would [be able to] say that there is a mature system - I don’t know after 5 years perhaps - and that schools emerge as the beautiful butterfly that is the Co-operative academy, y’know fully fledged and ready to go. But on the way there, you need support. (Deputy head teacher)

I suggest that the absence of a strategy for the growth and development of the co-operative academy schools has diminished their *co-operative power* to act, and reduced their future-

oriented state of confidence. Beyond the stated ideals of Co-operation, there is no consideration given to how schools might become co-operative and what it would mean for them to be so. A set of ideals is static, but a set of practices is dynamic and responsive. When the Co-operative College say that ‘there is no blueprint’, they fail to see how their idealism is standing in, and thus displacing, the complex relational dimension of ethical practice.

### **Responding to change: active/passive**

The school’s relationship to change and the external pressure of the rapidly moving landscape is key to understanding the Shorebank case. On the one hand, it spent a long time resisting the Academies programme and, on the other, it took a proactive approach to Co-operative development once it became an academy. However, the pace of change and the demands of transformation were almost too great. Shorebank was required to adapt to independence and change too quickly without having the opportunity to embed the necessary processes that it needed to develop its new identity. The pace of change was exhausting, and energy which might have been productively used to develop long-term Co-operative change was diverted by shorter-term political considerations.

Steve Bench had no regrets about becoming a Co-operative academy, ‘it was the right thing to do. I think that it kept the wolves from the door for a couple of years’. However, he admitted that the transformation at Shorebank had not been fast enough and one of the challenges had been in taking on the work that was previously carried out by the local authority,

In a standalone academy, you have to know all the changes that are coming, so you have got to be constantly making yourself aware and updating yourself. You’ve got to create the policy, and the practice, and the structures, and the systems, and adjust to those changes. You’ve got to do all of that leadership and management on your own. Which is what schools did for years but you also had a big local authority behind you for support and accountability. That’s gone, so you are on your own as an academy. (Steve Bench, head teacher)

The IT manager reflected that the recent years had been very difficult and he suggested that the pace of change away from the local authority to an independent academy had taken more energy and had been challenging,

[I]t has been a difficult few years. We had to deal a lot with the inception, a lot of changes have been happening ... I think we were forced into [academisation] by the government and I am not saying that it has been a bad thing but it could have been better if it was more thought out. It was a massively quick change and then, as a result of that, other changes have been instigated that have taken energy and effort.

They have become a challenge, they have become something that detracts from the jobs that people do on a normal basis (IT Manager)

According to Spinoza, processes of individuation and becoming depend on the universal laws of motion and rest. An individual body achieves stability only insofar as there is a constant proportion of motion and rest (EIII7). The accounts regarding the pace of change at Shorebank suggest that this balance became out of kilter and this affected the capacity of the school to maintain itself and sustain its energy. When the IT manager recalls the ‘massively quick change’ over ‘a difficult few years’ he is pointing to the difficulties that the school has faced in responding to these external factors and how this may have led to internal pressure and, in Spinozist terms, decomposition and disintegration of power.

The pressure that the school was under to demonstrate ‘dramatic quick results’ was at odds with how they thought they would be able to sustain longer-term growth, which, as the deputy head explained, would be built on relationships,

I think that people do ask questions because sometimes ‘the Co-operative way’ and the things that we are building, aren’t necessarily producing the dramatic quick results that people want. But they will produce the long-term results and we still have to do that, we still have to build that development, to develop the constituencies or ... the RVCLP. You have to build partnerships and relationships slowly because you can’t enforce them. Unless they are, literally, enforced. But that doesn’t suggest to me that [they would be] long term, or sustainable, or based on values. Education is about more than just exam results, it’s about principles and rounded individuals (Deputy head teacher)

From a Spinozist perspective we can see how Shorebank is seeking to emphasise collective and democratic transformation based on ‘peaceful alliance rather than domination’ (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999 p. 118). Spinoza tells us that we express power when we act rather than when we are acted upon, Shorebank’s recognition that it must ‘bring the community along’ in processes of transformation acknowledges that long term change is transindividual rather than merely transactional.

## Conclusion

Steepston is championed as a ‘flagship’ Co-operative school and is often presented as the best example of the Co-operative school vision in action. I found that Steepston was invested in the co-operative values and used these to underpin school transformation, particularly with regard to teaching and learning. The testimony of the staff and students with whom I spoke reveals a school that is working hard to ‘live the values’ in its daily practice but, because of the challenging circumstances in which it operates, this is always under a degree of pressure. I am able to see more clearly the potential that exists for

Steepston to continue to develop its co-operative practice. Importantly, it does not consider itself to be a finished product but considers itself to be ‘on a journey’.

Steepston’s status as a Co-operative school is a recent iteration of a longer values-based transformation, which began in 1995, and led to an intrinsic, rather than merely extrinsic, motivation when confronted by expanding Academies programme. To the extent that Steepston operates with active and dynamic self-preservation, constructed locally and in response to multiple external pressures, this school achieves an ontologically co-operative expression, rather than merely instrumental. We can see from the kinds of practices that pre-date the conversion, and the continued growth, that it is constantly ‘striving’ to live according to this sense of itself.

The portrait of Steepston Co-operative Academy offers a dual perspective. On the one hand, we are witness to an increase in neoliberal reform policies, the intensification of the school improvement agenda and the dominant logic of the marketplace. On the other, we learn about a school community, striving to survive in difficult circumstances, determined to establish and maintain an ethic of co-operation that it has nurtured over a period of twenty years. The case study illustrates the complex situation in which the school operates, one in which the staff and governors are implicated in routine processes of neoliberal governance and performance whilst simultaneously striving to be activists for co-operative change and transformation.

Shorebank is a complex case with deep contradictions. It initially turned to the Co-operative foundation model in order to resist academisation and then, when this was no longer an option, it looked to the Co-operative schools project for ‘solidarity’ as it decided to ‘go it alone’ as a Co-operative ‘converter’ academy. Once committed to this path, the school threw itself into developing its Co-operative ethos and identity and began processes of internal and external relationship building. It has worked hard to conform to the letter of the Co-operative model but their journey reveals particular issues for the Co-operative schools project. On one level there is a positive story to tell. At the time of my visit they were 28 months along their journey and they had made impressive progress – staff, students and the wider community spoke positively about the school. However, Shorebank remained vulnerable and the performance data indicated that students were not making the expected levels of progress – the Ofsted judgement identified ‘serious weaknesses’ and the school was required to make rapid improvements. The senior leadership team were disappointed by the lack of strategy and capacity within the Co-operative schools project to help them develop.

They believed that had been proactive, demonstrating the Co-operative values of ‘self-help’ and ‘self-responsibility’, as they worked to generate co-operative relationships inside and beyond the school.

I show here how Spinoza’s practical philosophy regarding the link between reason and imagination helps us make sense of how these schools are trapped in a cycle of fear and hope that feeds off their vulnerability in the larger economic context. I also show how their co-operative practice is constrained by various socio-political forces, and that Spinoza’s theory of *co-operative power* helps to reveal increases and decreases in the *co-operative power* to act.





## Chapter 8. Conclusion: the ethics and politics of the Co-operative academy

*Spinoza did not believe in hope or even in courage; he believed only in joy and vision*  
(Deleuze, 1988:14)

*The Ethics is necessarily an ethics of joy: only joy is worthwhile, joy remains, bringing us near to action, and to the bliss of action*  
(Deleuze, 1988:28)

This thesis examines the development of the Co-operative schools project in England, which has been positioned as a hopeful, values-based alternative to the controversial Academies programme. The research sets out to explore what the Co-operative alternative *is* and *how* the values and principles of the consumer Co-operative movement are translated to achieve educational transformation in schools.

The Co-operative schools project was introduced in Chapter 1 and a warrant for the research was established. In Chapter 2, a contextual framework was provided through a discussion of the key education reforms that established a marketplace in the English schools sector, and particular focus was given to the evolution of the Academies programme. Chapter 3 provided reviews of relevant literature relating to the concept of co-operative education and the involvement of the UK Co-operative movement in the English schools sector. Chapter 4 provided an exegesis of key concepts in Spinoza's *Ethics* and developed an original theoretical framework for the interpretation and analysis of the research. Chapter 5 described how the project design evolved in relation to the questions and outlined the methods that were used. Chapter 6 presented the intrinsic case study of the Co-operative College. Chapter 7 presented the supplementary case studies of Steepston Academy and Shorebank Academy.

This final chapter returns to the questions that guided this project and identifies the contributions to knowledge that the thesis makes. This chapter considers the idea of the transindividual school and explores its possibilities, opening towards future research ideas. References and appendices follow the main body of the thesis.

### Responding to the Research Questions

This thesis posed the following questions:

**RQ1:** How does the Co-operative schools project position Co-operative schools as a mechanism for school transformation?

**RQ2:** How have stakeholders interpreted and engaged with the Co-operative schools project?

**RQ3:** How have national to local contextual factors influenced the development of the Co-operative schools project?

**RQ4:** How might Spinoza's theory of transindividual co-operative power be mobilised to rethink the potential of Co-operative schools?

I designed a research approach to respond to these questions, which involved the development of an appropriate theoretical framework and the development of a multi-site ethnographic case study to examine the evolution of the Co-operative schools project in England. Integral to the design of this project was my role as 'embedded researcher' at the Co-operative College, enabling a unique research perspective on the expanding initiative.

In respect of **RQ1** and **RQ3**, the literature reviews in Chapters 2 and 3 showed the way in which the Co-operative movement established itself within the changing schools sector by responding to changes in policy. This process begins in 2004, when the Co-operative Group became a sponsor for Business and Enterprise Colleges, in 2008 the Co-operative Group and the Co-operative College developed a Co-operative foundation 'trust' model, and in 2011, the Co-operative College developed a Co-operative 'converter' academy model. In 2015, the Co-operative schools project claimed a network of 850 schools (Co-operative College, 2015), which were affiliated to the values and principles of the global Co-operative movement (Woodin, 2015b). These schools are positioned as a hopeful, values-based alternative (Facer et al., 2012) to the controversial academies programme – the most profound English education reform programme in recent times (Ball, 2009; Gunter, 2015; Ball, 2017). The empirical research presented in Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrates that there is indeed an appetite for 'alternative' and 'values-based' school models amongst teachers, parents and communities. However, it is not clear what the Co-operative alternative is or how the values and principles of the consumer Co-operative movement translate to achieve educational transformation in schools.

Responding to **RQ2**, a programme of qualitative research was undertaken at five different sites, including the Co-operative College and four Co-operative academy schools. A total number of 147 participants were interviewed and three case studies are represented in this thesis. The research tracks the way in which the initiative evolved as both a feature of, and a resistance to, processes of marketisation and privatisation in education. The study critically examines the rhetoric and strategy of the UK Co-operative movement as it expands into a rapidly changing schools sector. The research demonstrates that the Co-operative schools project lacks an adequate theoretical foundation and has engaged in a non-strategic approach

of resistance and hope – factors that serve to limit the co-operative power of its member schools.

In respect of **RQ4**, this thesis turns to the political philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) for a theory of co-operation. The research demonstrates the way in which Spinoza's collective individual (or transindividual) offers an alternative ontological positioning to the competitive and utility maximizing individual of the neoliberal subject. This alternative foundation offers a productive lens through which to reconfigure co-operative education, with wider implications for the reimagination of schools and their communities.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

The key contribution of this research is in the identification of Spinoza's practical philosophy as an appropriate theoretical lens for interpreting and developing the ontological foundations of co-operative education. Building on the work of Spinoza (1996), Balibar (1997, 1998), and Gatens and Lloyd (1999) the research employs the concept of transindividuality, which emphasises the co-operative power of the collective individual. The thesis concludes that for educational transformation the Co-operative schools project must move beyond the handed-down values of consumer Co-operatives, and consider the transindividual power of a fully embodied and locally constituted co-operative pedagogy, involving an expansive and dynamic appreciation of the school community.

### **Sharing the research with the Co-operative movement**

Throughout the course of this project my close relationship with the Co-operative College meant that there were regular opportunities for me to develop and share my research with Co-operative practitioners and non-academic audiences at the Co-operative College, The Co-operative Group and the Co-operative Research Action Group (CRAG). My research was formally presented and discussed at the annual Co-operative Education Conference in 2015, 2016 and 2017. I was also invited to present my research at the Co-operative Research Action Group (CRAG) in November 2015.

These opportunities were useful, both in terms of my development as a researcher but also as they helped me to progress the work, through a regular process of communication with users, partners and funders of the research. Learning how to present my, sometimes difficult, findings to such mixed audiences was a challenging but rewarding experience. In addition to

these ‘public-facing’ activities, there were also some opportunities for me to use the research in order to contribute to knowledge at the Co-operative College, particularly from 2015.

## Discussion

Throughout this project I have used Spinoza’s theory of *co-operative power* radically and integrally. The selected case studies describe the socio-political reality, which I seek to explore, and these provide a frame for showing how Spinoza’s theory works in relation to the possibility of a co-operative transformation of schools. This means that Spinoza’s theory is not merely positioned as an aide to sense-making but that it becomes a radical condition of possibility for making sense of and enabling the co-operative potential of Co-operative schools. In other words, Spinoza’s ideas can be used to critique the current Co-operative schools project, but also, and essentially, as a way of imagining a future for Co-operative schools. This is an important point as we consider the role that a philosopher like Spinoza should play in an intellectual endeavour like this. A Spinozist-inspired philosophy is simultaneously critical and creative, engendering new paths of transindividuality whilst carefully and rigorously uncovering the sources of individualism.

I argue that this Spinozist theorization of the Co-operative schools project reveals the theoretical potential of the Co-operative academy school to respond to the neoliberal vision of academisation with a positive stance of dynamic co-operation, by repositioning the public as active stakeholders, prioritising inclusion and embracing co-operation as an affirmative operating philosophy. Of course, this was always the vision, however my research reveals a mixed picture and, whilst there are some nascent examples, there are many more missed opportunities. My analysis demonstrates that much of the vision remains unrealised and that there is limited power in the network to develop. I offer a theoretical analysis of the present situation and, drawing upon a theory of co-operation that I have identified in Spinoza, I develop and argue in favour of a dynamic co-operation, which may be better equipped to respond to the pressures of the 21<sup>st</sup> century education sector.

Spinoza gives us the tools to think through the complexity of the changing school system and analyse the emergent Co-operative schools project, which I have approached as a body composed of a number of parts. Spinoza provides tools to interpret and analyse the Co-operative schools project and, I argue, to follow a seam of possibility towards a joyful transindividual power. Spinoza’s *Ethics* is an ‘ethos’, a way of life, which promises to free us from the illusions that limit us. This issue of how to recognize illusion is crucial for Spinoza. Spinoza’s theory helps to illuminate some of the myths, false claims and denials that work

from within the Co-operative schools project to sabotage the practice of co-operation as it evolves and positions itself in a rapidly changing schools system.

The theory of co-operation that I find in the *Ethics* reveals transindividuality as a powerful force and joyful consequence of being. Spinoza allows for a robust conception of a Co-operative academy, leaving aside limiting discourses of ‘hope’ and ‘resistance’ and imagining a powerful school body that works to enhance the power of the collective individual, to realise the collective and individual potential of all stakeholders - students, teachers, parents and the local communities.

### **The Co-operative schools project**

My research shows the way in which the emerging Co-operative schools project has struggled to fulfil the promise of a co-operative, values-based network of Co-operative schools. Whilst there is potential for school communities to develop co-operative forms of organisation and pedagogy, which might increase their *co-operative power*, they have, so far, been hampered in this process. The approach from the Co-operative College, which was characterised by the quest for numbers, has been undynamic and transactional – relying on narratives of resistance and hope, rather than an affirmative pedagogy of co-operation, which was positioned but never fully explored or resourced. I suggest that this failure to recognise the significance of co-operative pedagogy has left the Co-operative schools project in a weak position, where it has been forced to rely on the neoliberal idea of the ‘self-improving school’.

The expansion of the Academies programme worked to disrupt and dismantle established local authority structures of middle-tier support for schools. Simultaneously there has been an intensification of the standards agenda and many schools turned to the Co-operative schools project for an ethical alternative and resistances to wider unwelcome changes.

However, in order to approach the kind of transformation that was envisioned and hoped for, schools needed practical support. In fact, there were no ‘adequate’ ideas of Co-operation and no practical strategies for developing co-operative practice within the schools. The Co-operative schools project repurposed the 19th century values of the Co-operative movement and adapted legal models that had been used in other sectors, as the project rolled out the onus was on the schools to exercise ‘self-responsibility’ and ‘self-help’.

This thesis argues that, in its process of expansion into the schools sector, the Co-operative schools project did not attend to the substance of their hopeful vision and failed to recognise the significance of pedagogy to the process of education and schooling. Recent neoliberal

school reform has emphasised structural change to engender school improvement and raise standards, and the Co-operative schools project responded to opportunities created by the expanding market. I argue that this emphasis overlooks the significant role of pedagogy in school transformation. The method of school transformation and, thus, the route to school improvement is, necessarily, pedagogical. Spinoza's theory of *co-operative power*, which relies on transindividual relationships, allows us to rethink the idea of school transformation through transindividual pedagogy. The Co-operative schools project neglected to attend to the most fundamental aspects of the question *what makes a school co-operative?* In order for schools to realise the power of the 'co-operative advantage' they needed more than legal governance structures and a hopeful vision – they needed to ground co-operative practice in an active co-operative pedagogy.

I am attracted to the potential in Spinoza to offer a theory of co-operation to the Co-operative schools project. There are a number of reasons why I think Spinoza is useful. My research has revealed a theoretical absence at the heart of the Co-operative schools project, which relies on a set of values drawn from the historical practice of the consumer Co-operative movement. I suggest that these Co-operative values and principles are insufficient to the task of school transformation – frequently functioning as an 'ethical brand' with the risk of meaninglessness or co-optation. From the outset it has been important to me to understand what potential there is in the Co-operative schools project to offer something different, I was interested in why the Co-operative movement entered the education sector and what, in particular, does it offer to the schools which have chosen to adopt the Co-operative 'converter' academy model? It might be said that that Co-operative ethics and values, as they stand, represent the ethics and values of schools in general. It is, arguably, the case that most schools can identify with the Co-operative values and principles - it would be unusual for a school not to consider *self-help*, *self-responsibility*, *democracy*, *equality*, *equity*, *solidarity* as important educational principles – even if interpretations or emphasis might differ from school to school. Indeed, this is a key observation of my research, many schools opted to take a Co-operative pathway because they felt that it was most aligned with what they were already, the pathway that would involve the least amount of change. Does the process of becoming a Co-operative school really only involve changing to stay the same? If so, this is very problematic for the Co-operative schools project.

This thesis demonstrates that the idea of the 'co-operative school' was never fully interrogated. My research has shown that co-operative power is a practice not a product, is not an ethical brand and cannot be reduced to a set of values. It must be understood as a

practice, as a way of being. The idea of a 'co-operative school' cannot be fixed, indeed the attempt to connect it too tightly to the 'ethics and values' of the Co-operative movement is a stultifying thing, but nor can it be so open to interpretation that it risks undermining itself. This thesis argues that a 'co-operative school', invested with co-operative power, is not a static ideal - it is mutable and dynamic. This means that co-operative practice is agreed and constituted within the school itself. I suggest that a 'co-operative school' cannot be so called unless it has a fully co-operative pedagogy, which extends beyond the classroom and into the wider community. I acknowledge that this thesis represents the beginning of an attempt to translate Spinoza's theory of co-operative power to the Co-operative schools project. Spinoza provides a theory of the collective, showing us that we are not autonomous individuals, separate and distinct, but that we are intimately connected.

### **Towards a transindividual school?**

In Chapter 4, I provided a detailed account of the theory of co-operation that I find in the *Ethics*, it is based on a form of 'collective individualism', which Balibar (1997) and others (Gatens and Lloyd, 1999; Read, 2015) have called transindividuality. Transindividuality is a way of being, implying forms of expression that are dynamic, ethical, affirmative and democratic.

Spinoza's theory of co-operation allows us to think beyond and in excess of narrow conceptualisations of 'individual' and provides us with a platform from which we might begin to challenge dominant neoliberal ideas. The idea of the atomised individual is the foundation of neoliberal conceptions of person and economy. The Co-operative 'converter' academy is haunted by binaries which are forced by the dominant neoliberal discourse and which, I argue, work to curtail the potential of these schools, for example, private/public, competition/co-operation, individual/collective. There is an uncertainty about where these schools might 'fit' and, attendant to that uncertainty, no small degree of discomfit, denial and shame. I suggest that Spinoza offers a theoretical pathway beyond this binary thinking and enables a theorisation of a transindividual school, liberated from these constraints.

What might a transindividual school, operating within a transindividual network of schools, look like? Can notions of privatisation, marketisation, atomisation - which seem to rest on a narrow conceptualisation of 'individual' - become 'neutralised' with this expanded conception of the individual? Might these schools be released from the binaries (maintained



schools ‘good’ academy schools ‘bad’ and vice versa), and allowed to define themselves through the doctrine of transindividualism?

Spinoza’s transindividualism is not simply a way for individuals – as conceptualized according to the neoliberal agenda – to work together or collaboratively. The entire notion of individual is reconsidered and perhaps even circumvented, through a collective connectivity across the pre-individual level of affect and intellect. This linking through affect and intuitive knowledge forms a collectivity beneath and above the level of the individual, forging a relational ontology that is in some sense larger than human life. Spinoza maps out an open community, an inclusive materialism, an intuitive rational method for coming together and refusing the kind of humanist individualism that covers up the truths of our relationships. Spinoza posits *conatus* at the centre of his ethics, a term that designates a body’s power to affect and to be affected. Although *conatus* is associated with individuals and their attainment of perfection, trans-perfection is somewhat fatal for the individual. *Conatus* in the *Ethics* is not the drive to sustain the individual, nor to perfect the individual, but to engender a perfection more generally. This kind of pursuit is maximized through becoming transindividual. One of the biggest obstacles of transindividuality is delusion, of not knowing one is situated and subject to the material conditions of the environment, of imagining free will and personal honour and success are expressions of an individual. With Spinoza, collectivity is not the collection of disparate individuals simply coming together with a shared goal.

With this in mind, we now ask: What potential opens up for values-based organisation in a performance driven sector? What spaces become available to explore the impact of markets and competition on social justice, equity, equality and democracy? My research reveals the that process of ‘becoming an academy’ was a highly affective process, school leaders and governors felt ‘torn’ and the decision was often presented as a necessary one for economic survival. Autonomy is one of the key drivers of the Academies programme and the ‘academy freedoms’ were seen as incentives for conversion. These notions of autonomy and freedom are prescribed - autonomy is from the ‘bureaucracy’ of local government and the freedoms are of ‘choice’ regarding ‘specialism’ and ‘diversity’. Critics suggest that this emphasis, which relies on selection, exclusion and efficiency, is at odds with the notion of the common school. How does a Spinozist conception of autonomy/freedom respond to this tension? How do Co-operative academy schools use their freedoms to be otherwise? What potential is

there for Co-operative academy schools to use their autonomy and apply their freedoms with the logic of dynamic co-operation?

### **The Academies programme and neoliberal power**

As a result of the 2010 Academies Act there was significant upheaval in the system and there is a strong sense in the data that these schools were ‘striving’ for survival on their own terms, such that a school’s motivation for taking the co-operative pathway were multiple. Some saw the benefits of academisation but knew that such a move would be not be supported by parents/teachers and the Co-op model served to ameliorate those concerns. Some chose the Co-operative model because they thought that it would give them greater powers of self-government via community strength, others because they thought that they were joining a strong network, where there would be some protection. The idea of the ‘co-operative schools network’ is one of the most powerful and disappointing aspects of this whole story. It demonstrates the essential difference between static and dynamic self-preservation (Duffy, 2010). Dynamic co-operative academies would always convert for transformation not preservation, they would be less concerned with ‘co-operative identity’ than with *co-operative power* to act.

Janik (2015) argues that Spinoza’s metaphysics allows us to think about power not only in terms of fixed planes of state organisation, such as legal or moral statutes, but also in terms of a bubbling energy of transformation and production. He suggests that democracy has merely become a ‘system of mediation’ and that attempts to restore a constitutive notion of democracy are a political challenge. He argues that modern conceptions of power and of social relations attempt to repress the question of being, but thinking with Spinoza allows us to replace it and consider being as an infinite generative power, which is constitutive and productive. This might sound like something that cannot be put into practice in the actual material world, and therefore something that refuses a certain pragmatic or practical application. However, as Deleuze (1988) reminds us, Spinoza is nothing but a practical philosopher. Spinoza’s project in the *Ethics* begins with ontology and the nature of embodied being, and opens towards an inquiry into the nature of affect, desire and the everyday habits of humans living and learning together. Spinoza uses the notion of the infinite in ways that make it a generative power, rather than an ideal or something that negates the finite world. Duffy (2016) summarizes this reading of Spinoza in these terms: ‘The actual infinite is therefore the immanent expression in the affections, or the finite modes, of infinite substance, which is their cause. It is the adequate knowledge of this actual infinite as the immanent expression of the infinite of substance in and by a finite mode which constitutes

... the third kind of knowledge' (p.27). Thus, the infinite is ground and expressed in the messy finite world, and it is our ethical duty to comprehend it. This tall order is precisely what makes Spinoza's project both inspiring and daunting.

The connections that I made between Spinoza's own political context and the contemporary moment were an important part of the process of developing my idea to bring them together to interpret and critique the Co-operative schools project. Integral to this was a reflection on my own experience, which I present as an ebbing and flowing capacity to effect change.

The marketisation of the schools sector and the academisation of schools is the original problem of my research. As the sector changes through multiple and layered processes of marketisation and quasi-privatisation there is a sense of threat and vulnerability to existing values, such as, for instance, democracy and inclusion. The schools that participated in this study felt actually vulnerable or they felt that their ethos was vulnerable. As the schools sector adapts and adopts the values of the market, for example, competition, self-interest, and individualism, there is a sense in which schools are commodified as 'exam factories' (Hutchings, 2015). The uncoupling of schools from local authority administration, via the Academies programme, means that local government involvement in education is reduced. This has led to an anxiety about the erosion of democracy and a concern that the most vulnerable children will suffer.

Marx was critical of the potential for social transformation offered by co-operation in a capitalist society, arguing that revolution not co-operation is required. Perhaps this point is illustrated by the tensions that exist around the Co-operative 'converter' academies. These new school models have moved into neoliberal spaces created by the break-up of the established system. They remain as inhabitants of the wider neoliberal system, subject to the same measures of accountability and performativity. So far, they are not radical schools, offering distinct alternatives. Thus, their status as an 'alternative' or as 'resistance' is highly problematic.

The transformation of public sector education to private sector business, values-based organisation in a performance driven sector, the impact of markets and competition on social justice - equity, equality and democracy. Is there in the Co-operative 'converter' academy the possibility of repositioning the public, as Co-operative stakeholders, and the potential to emphasise Co-operative values alongside performance? How far and to what extent are these ideas possible in the context of a wider system that is inhospitable to such utopian imaginings and, arguably, has an entirely opposite utopia in mind? In a sense all of

these dilemmas, and their associated tensions and pressures, rest upon a notion of individuality that Spinoza's ontology fundamentally expands. As Brown and Stenner put it:

The method begins from a point that exceeds individualism..., concerning itself instead with the 'necessary connections' by which relations are constituted. Spinoza challenges us to begin not by recourse to biology or culture, or indeed any of the great dualist formations, but with the particularity proper to an encounter. (Brown and Stenner, 2001:97)

### **Hope and fear**

Across both case study schools presented in this thesis, there was an attitude of fear towards academisation and the Co-operative academy model was interpreted as a hopeful alternative. Spinoza's idea of sad passions reveals how this positioning compromises the *conatus*. Spinoza suggests that 'hope is an inconstant joy' (EIIIDefAff), which arises from an idea of a future or past thing the outcome of which is in doubt and that 'fear is an inconstant sadness' (EIIIDefAff), which also arises from an idea of a future or past thing the outcome of which is in doubt. So, using this analysis, both hope and resistance become non-affirmative states. In contrast, Spinoza tells us that 'confidence is a joy born of the idea of a future or past thing concerning which the cause of doubting has been removed' (EIIIDefAff). Thus, hope and resistance are non-affirmative states, while confidence and a strategy of action to augment power are the means of affirmation. This analysis shows how sad passions were entailed in the reasoning about school conversion with a diminishing effect on the *conatus*. Whilst the Co-operative academy was positioned as a hopeful alternative it was always already a diminishing possibility and a cause of sadness; the hopeful are called to imagine a future where their ideal school is possible but the very nature of hope means that they are always in doubt, fearing that its impossibility will be the certain outcome.

The Academies programme has initiated massive change and transformation in the schools system, it represents a huge structural change, which was strategically planned and has been massively resourced. At the time of writing in Jan 2018, the ambition that all schools will have academy status by 2020 does not seem far-fetched - over 60% of secondary schools have adopted academy status and, although pace of conversions has slowed, there is still a steady flow of schools 'in the pipeline' (DFE, 2017). This systemic transformation will be hard to reverse and, moreover, there is no political appetite for it – except in a few areas, school ties with the local authority have been severed and the concurrent programme of austerity means that local councils will be unable to take schools back. Thus, the neoliberal accomplishments of the Academies programme are massive, with wide-reaching implications for education, democracy and social justice, stretching far into the future. This education

reform cannot be countered with ‘resistance’, and the narratives of ‘hope’ and ‘fear’ that were circulated by the Co-operative schools project were insufficient and misleading.

Through the determination that the Co-operative schools project is a ‘resistance’ and an ‘alternative’ to neoliberal models of education, it rests on a foundation of negativity and absence. In Spinozist terms there is a significant problem with positioning these schools in terms of what they are not – they are not predatory, they are not competitive etcetera – because, for Spinoza, ‘things which agree only in negation, or in what they do not have, really agree in nothing’ (EIVP32S). I suggest that in positioning itself as a ‘resistance’ and ‘alternative’ to neoliberal schooling, without attending to the nature of what it is, the Co-operative schools project, and the schools which have joined it, run the risk of false agreement, that is agreeing only in what it is not. Spinoza writes,

If someone says that black and white agree only in this, that neither is red, he affirms absolutely that black and white agree in nothing. Similarly, if someone says that a stone and a man agree only in this, that each is finite, lacks power, does not exist from the necessity of its nature, or, finally is indefinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, he affirms completely that a stone and a man do not agree in anything. For things which agree only in negation, or in what they do not have, really agree in nothing (EIVP32S)

For Spinoza, imagination is integral to the flourishing of human beings – only through this vital reworking and expression of the material reality can rationality, understanding and power be increased – expanding the collective individual is our ethical responsibility. That is, by attending to our own and others becoming. In this sense, a school that places transindividuality at the heart of what is, is a community which is committed to the expansion of the collective individual. It is ironic that the Co-operative schools project neglected to consider the power of people and relationships within its schools. Each Co-operative school is a community of students, teachers and parents, which also extends beyond the school and forms part of many other local communities. This is the *co-operative power* of a Co-operative school, which rather than recourse to hope, can develop an affirmative power of action through an expansive notion of co-operative pedagogy and membership – considered, strategic and resourced.

### **Co-operative pedagogy as transindividual practice or activism**

As we consider the stated values of the Co-operative schools project (self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity), we can see how they represent the kind of education that might be adequate to Spinoza’s philosophy. However, I argue that

schools invested with *co-operative power* would not merely be a ‘resistance’ or an ‘alternative’ to neoliberalism – they would be something else entirely.

Montag (1999) writes that Spinoza’s philosophy must and does produce real effects, he suggests that it is the ‘real effects’ of excommunication and heresy that serve to underline Spinoza’s significance. The nature of the truth, which Spinoza sought to reveal, presented him with a number of problems – how could he produce these real effects in his own contemporary context? It was not enough for Spinoza ‘to abandon his works to fortune’ (p.3) hoping that that his ideas would be understood by a receptive future readership. Instead he sought to provide his readership with the tools through which they might access his ideas. Montag writes,

Spinoza sought not to convince his readers to abandon theology (which is not merely a set of disembodied ideas that might be accepted or rejected at will, but rather ideas immanent in a set of practice that are in certain ways inescapable), but instead to show them how to think rationally within it, in its terms, in a way that not only accepts the premises of any theology, but which offers itself as theology’s strongest defence, thereby turning it against itself (p.4)

Montag suggests that by employing ‘a strategy of translation and displacement’ (p.4) Spinoza occupies the territory of his opponents and uses their most powerful weapons against them. This offers exciting possibilities as we use Spinoza’s theory of *co-operative power* to imagine and position a transindividual school. In the contemporary moment neoliberalism seems to be totalizing regime, beyond which it is impossible to act – it seems that one of the most profound accomplishments of neoliberalism is that it has colonized all possibilities of thinking otherwise, such that strategies for ‘fighting’ or ‘resisting’ are always reduced to articles of hope and despair. It is exciting to think of the transindividual Co-operative ‘converter’ academy, not as a resistance but, rather as a confident articulation of academisation. Thus becoming its ‘strongest defence’, opening spaces for stakeholders to ‘think rationally within it’ and to prove to neoliberalism, through a strategy of translation and displacement, that individualism is *always* the collective affect of transindividualism.

Marx’s concept of praxis (Marx, 1977, 1983) is useful for thinking about the forms of activism that Co-operative schools might undertake in order to resist the hegemony of standards and competition. Madison (2012) understands praxis as ‘the creation of alternative ways of being and courageous engagement with the world in order to change it’ (p.67). The Co-operative schools project offered a glimpse of that possibility with none of the practicalities developed. Spinoza’s is a ‘practical philosophy’. The *Ethics* describes an ‘ethos’,

a way of life - hope and fear are sad passions - ‘resistance’ and ‘alternative’ offer a bogus refuge. Instead, there must be an emphasis on local ownership, on dynamic and reflexive practice.

### **An incompatibility of political agenda and philosophical mission?**

Watkins (1986) discusses the nature of co-operative education and its tendency towards propaganda. He accepts that the two are closely bound together when he writes, ‘much of Co-operative Education cannot help being propaganda’ (p.125), but he insists that the propagandist and the educationalist have distinct aims, which give rise to different methods. He suggests that the objective of the propagandist is to ‘persuade people to think, feel and act’ in a particular way, which is achieved through ‘action on masses’ in order to ‘influence individuals’ (p.125). In contrast, the method of the educationalist is to ‘influence the masses through his action on individuals’ (p.125). Watkins explains that the educationalist,

is not primarily interested in what the individual thinks or believes, but rather in how he thinks and reaches his opinions – that is, in his power to apprehend facts clearly and to reason from them to valid conclusions, and how that power to think for himself can be developed. In the practical sphere *the educator is concerned with the individual’s power to act*, with his skill and performance in various directions, in order to develop them to the limits of his native ability, as a means whereby he can serve his community and, maybe, express himself. Whereas the propagandist’s aim may be a momentary act, such as making a cross on a ballot paper, the educationalist’s aim is to cultivate a talent or a capacity which remains the individual’s permanent possession (p.125, my emphasis)

The distinction that Watkins draws between the educationalist and the co-operator offers a useful analysis of the priorities and tensions that have been at work in the emerging Co-operative schools project. I suggest that in the quest for numbers, the policy at the Co-operative College was ‘propagandist’, even if the longer-term hope was for something deeper. This can be positioned in contrast to the approach that I saw in the schools. For example, at Steepston Academy, co-operative pedagogy was integrated as the means to the end rather than as the end in itself, and at Shorebank Academy where there was an acknowledgement that, ‘you have to build partnerships and relationships slowly’. My research points to a significant tension between the political ambitions of the Co-operative College and the philosophical ambitions of those in the education sector.

Within the Co-operative movement there is a resistance to ‘top-down’ strategies of development and a preference for ‘grassroot’ growth. However, within the Co-operative schools project there was significant ‘top-down’ intervention, in terms of the changing policy landscape and introduction of specific Co-operative school models. Although there was the

frequent suggestion at the Co-operative College that the growth had been spontaneous, the extent of ‘grassroots’ growth is questionable – schools were variously incentivised and coerced by wider government policy, mainly connected to the Academies programme, and the Co-operative schools project positioned itself as a ‘resistance’ and ‘alternative’ to that. Thus, the suggestion that the Co-operative schools project ‘grew topsy’ and that it is ‘a grassroots movement’ is not entirely accurate. Once the schools had converted the idea of ‘grassroots’ development persisted as the Co-operative schools project offered ‘no blueprint’ for schools to follow and they were left alone to interpret their new status in a changed educational landscape.

The 2010 Academies legislations achieved two things, which would come to have a significant impact on the Co-operative schools project. On the one hand it created the opportunity for good and outstanding schools to adopt academy status (where, during the previous Labour administration the academy had been introduced as a final solution for failing schools) and, on the other, it also awarded a raft of new powers the Secretary of State for Education, including the power to recommend that a school *should* become a sponsored academy. Alongside this powerful legislative shift came a torrent of rhetorical positioning designed to disrupt long-held beliefs about the role and purpose of the local authority in education. Whilst these legislative changes created the possibility for the Co-operative ‘converter’ academies they also served to create an ongoing number of tensions and contradictions for the Co-operative schools project.

In many ways, the Co-operative schools project were caught up in the middle of this and the various triumphs and failures of the movement to interpret and respond to this systematic upheaval must be understood in the context of chaos that prevailed. During this period, the Co-operative College received increased enquiries about the Co-operative school models. The schools sector was changing rapidly, academisation was a hot topic and there was a sense of chaos and despair about the transformation underway. In this moment, many schools turned to the Co-operative schools project because it appeared to offer an alternative to the prevailing wind.

Mistakes were certainly made at the Co-operative College. In the excitement of optimism and change, some business was misinterpreted and other business was over-looked. It is also fair to say that as one sector moved into another sector much was misunderstood. There was little schools expertise at the Co-operative College - there was no one shaping policy, or developing strategy, there were no qualified teachers to develop pedagogical resources.



Whilst there were a few former headteachers and former local authority officers, whose experience was certainly useful, there was no contemporary understanding of the new pressures that schools were facing. For example, in regard to the impact of the changed inspection regimes, or the use of big data to inform policy. There was, at best, a nostalgic view of what a school ‘should’ be with no real vision about how they might become that. These retired associates from education and local government joined with the ambitious Co-operative movement, led by an ebullient CEO with political interests - it was a recipe for a certain type of change.

On the one hand, the Co-operative ‘trust’ school was presented and perceived as a distinct alternative to academisation, indeed some believed that it would offer a protection from the Academies programme. On the other hand, the Co-operative ‘converter’ academy was presented and perceived as an alternative *within* academisation. In each case the prevailing agenda and the associated legislation had a significant impact on the numbers of schools that approached the Co-operative College looking for information and guidance about the Co-operative school models.

The Co-operative College did not concern themselves too much with the motivations that schools had for converting to Co-operative status, and perhaps this was the biggest mistake that was made. Rather, the strategy was: sign them up, get them converted and then grow Co-operation in the years that followed. Whilst I understand the enthusiasm and optimism that lead to this pathway, there was never any strategy or any resource for doing that crucial post-conversion work. Furthermore, the idea that the ‘becoming Co-operative’ would be left to the schools themselves calls into question the idea that Co-operation is anything innovative or particular.

### **The free man and the Co-operative academy**

Lord (2017) offers a fruitful interpretation of Spinoza’s ideas around free market organisation, the role of money and profit, and the implications of these for society. Her reading of Spinoza and her ideas around his purpose in presenting the ‘free man’ in Part IV of the Ethics has useful implications as we consider the identity issues that are inherent in the emerging Co-operative academy school.

Lord’s analysis focuses on the passages of Ethics IV, which pose the problem of how to live virtuously in a mercantile economy. She suggests that, in positioning the ideal of the ‘free man’, Spinoza is offering a critique of a society, which values free market economics above other forms of social organisation. She suggests that Spinoza presents an image of the ‘free

man', as an ideal of true virtue, to be considered in specific comparison with competing representations of the good mercantile life. She suggests that Spinoza intends that this comparison be drawn in the mind of the wealthy burgher of Dutch society, who might wish to contemplate what it means to undertake virtuous commercial business.

Of course, this same comparative issue is applicable in the present moment. In a suddenly marketised and quasi-privatised education system educators and school administrators are faced with daily dilemmas about how to reconcile various conflicts of interest. The dismantling of state education and the marketisation of the sector overlooks some of the key issues that are at stake in trying to achieve a virtuous school. Spinoza says that to live virtuously is to live co-operatively, he says that money in and of itself is no bad thing and he acknowledges that humans will organise themselves through commerce, but he is clear that money and economic prosperity are not ends in themselves but exist as the means to live a good and virtuous life. There are many useful points of comparison with reference to the Co-operative academy schools - they are part of a larger marketized system but built within them is the structure or possibility for valuing things otherwise than market forces. This 'co-operative capacity' means that this type of academy school is, I want to suggest, much like the Burghers of Spinoza's society, and which are similarly well-placed to become 'more free' in the sense of being more determined by their own nature.

The neoliberal reform agenda provided both the context and the impetus for the Co-operative movement to enter the education sector - the development of a marketplace in education and the increased value of competition provided both the possibility of and the demand for Co-operative schools. These models appealed to schools because they provided a hopeful framework to negotiate the changing landscape in a way that might keep them in touch with values that were seen as essential. However, as we can see in the case of Steepston, the fact that these values already existed and were, in fact, established and resourced through well-funded initiatives such as the Specialist School Programme and the Extended Schools Programme calls into question the substance of the Co-operative schools project. That the Co-operative movement has been unable to provide financial or practical support to schools as they continue as Co-operative entities is particularly ironic. This leads me to conclude that, rather than creating an alternative to neoliberal education, the Co-

operative movement has relied on neoliberal reform and on the neoliberal concept of the ‘self-improving school’.

### **Future thinking**

In conducting this research, it has been important to me, personally, that I think about an affirmative future for Co-operative schools. The issue with the ‘anti-academisation’ position, which has exercised such a powerful influence within the Co-operative schools project, is that it curtails the very possibility of these schools. I argue that rather than resisting the marketisation of schools the Co-operative academies should be looking for ways to create a different version of the future.

There is a sense in which the Co-operative schools project is positioned as a nostalgic hope, when the imperative for schools must be to think of the present and of the future. The present moment is already different to the past, and the future will be different again. We should be equipping our children, indeed our whole communities, with the ideas and values that will nourish them in their lives ahead. Whilst it hasn’t happened in quite the way that was envisioned by Robert Hammond, there could yet be ‘a schools Co-operative movement’. There is certainly the potential for these schools to invest in their local communities, to build relationships, and to establish reservoirs of connectivity with which to sustain those communities.

This thesis concludes that for educational transformation the Co-operative schools project must move beyond the handed-down values of consumer Co-operatives, and consider the transindividual power of a fully embodied and locally constituted co-operative pedagogy, involving an expansive and dynamic appreciation of the school community within its community. Thus exceeding the very idea of ‘school’.

This is a critical moment for the Co-operative schools project. This thesis demonstrates that the energy of resistance and stasis is contrary to the active and dynamic approach that is necessary. I propose that the Co-operative schools project has to be wholly committed to the idea of itself as a unique model of school development, rather than focusing on narrower notions of school improvement. The Co-operative schools project must have confidence in its processes. There must be an adequate idea of what a co-operative school is, a common notion of how it works and what it does so that it becomes more than an ‘ethical brand’ but is a way of doing schooling and education that revitalises community relations and offers meaning to human lives in an automated future. James (2010) reminds us that Spinoza himself was drawing upon the resources of imagination to configure an idea of social life that

might inspire people to live according reason, and to recognise themselves as powerful agents in their own processes of becoming co-operative. The Co-operative schools project must work to be active imaginaries of future schools - braiding together the realities of the system with a radical co-operative vision for how the future might be.



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## Appendix A ICA Statement of Co-operative Identity

### Definition

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically controlled enterprise.

### Co-operative values

Co-operatives are based on the values of:

- self-help;
- self-responsibility;
- democracy;
- equality;
- equity;
- solidarity.

In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of **honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.**

### Co-operative Principles

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Principle: Voluntary and Open Membership

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Principle: Democratic Member Control

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Principle: Member Economic Participation

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

#### 4<sup>th</sup> Principle: Autonomy and Independence

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from

external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

**5<sup>th</sup> Principle: Education, Training and Information**

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

**6<sup>th</sup> Principle: Co-operation among Co-operatives**

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

**7<sup>th</sup> Principle: Concern for Community**



Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

Source: International Co-operative Alliance (ICA). 'Co-operative identity, values & principles'

<https://ica.coop/en/whats-co-op/co-operative-identity-values-principles> (accessed 25/01/2018)

## Appendix B Studentship advert





MEMBERSHIP
MEMBER LOGIN

 co-operative college


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### PhD studentship

23rd May 2013

Share this post on:    

The Education and Social Research Institute (ESRI) at Manchester Metropolitan University invites applications for a full-time PhD studentship. The studentship is for three years, subject to successful academic progress reviewed annually. The studentship, co-funded by MMU and the Co-operative College, will be held in the Centre for Difference, Diversity and Social Justice.

The studentship will focus on the rapidly developing co-operative schools movement. Currently there are just over 400 co-operative schools in the UK with more on the way. The key question for the research is 'what makes a school 'co-operative'? This will include exploring such questions as: What difference does co-operative educational philosophy and practice make to learning and achievement? What are the qualities and attributes needed to lead as a Head and at all levels in a co-operative school? What professional development is required to support self improving schools? Distributed leadership, leadership development and the development of a more participatory culture at all levels and contexts within a school and its community will be explored. What broader impact is there on young people and their communities?





The studentship will work alongside a knowledge exchange project focusing on the development of a learning platform that will enable schools, communities and researchers to share their experience, ideas and practices. This may provide research access and contribute to the development of an evidence base for the research. The student will be expected to undertake case studies and surveys.

Applications are invited from candidates with a recent first or upper second in a relevant undergraduate degree and preferably candidates who have a master's degree that has included research training. Relevant subject areas include education, sociology, politics and social anthropology.

For more information and how to apply please see advert and information below or visit [www.mmu.ac.uk/studentships](http://www.mmu.ac.uk/studentships).

Closing date for applications: Friday 21 June

What makes a school co-operative? advertisementWhat makes a school co-operative? information

Share this post on:    

There are 0 comment(s)

To view further comments and reply please login or register.

Filed Under:  
Researching Co-operatives • Schools And Young People



## **Appendix C    Semi-structured interview schedule (school-based research)**

**Key question:** What is a co-operative academy school and how does it work co-operatively?

### **Questions for Senior Leaders/Governors**

- How would you describe this school?
- Why did this school join the Co-operative schools project?
- How do the Co-operative values inform the work of the school?
- How are the stakeholders involved in the work of the school?
- What is your relationship with other Co-operatives/Schools Co-operative Society?
- Where do you think that Co-operation is working at its best?
- What are/have been the challenges?
- What are your hopes for the future?

### **Questions for Student Focus Group**

- How would you describe this school?
- What does it mean to be a Co-operative school? (How do you use Co-operative values in your school? How do the Co-operative values benefit you/your school?)
- What are the different ways that students can have a say in what happens at your school? Do you work with any other people (staff, governors, parents, community members) to make decisions about what happens? Can you talk about any changes that have happened as a result?
- What are the things that you enjoy most about your school? What would you like to change?

### **Questions for Staff Focus Group**

- How would you describe this school?
- What does it mean to be a Co-operative school? (How do you use Co-operative values at work? How do the Co-operative values benefit you/the school?)
- What are the different ways that staff can have a say in what happens at the school? Do staff work with any other people (students, governors, parents, community members) to make decisions about what happens? Can you talk about any changes that have happened as a result?
- What does the school do well? What could be improved?

### **Questions for Parent/Community Focus Group**

- How would you describe this school?
- What does it mean to be a Co-operative school? How are Co-operative values used in the school? How do the Co-operative values benefit you/your child/the community?
- What are the different ways that parents/community members can have a say in what happens at the school? Do parents/community members work with any other people (students, staff, governors) to make decisions about what happens? Can you talk about any changes that have happened as a result?
- What does the school do well? What could be improved?



## **Appendix D Initial contact email - Co-operative 'converter' academies (Phase 3)**

Dear ...,

Re: Request for research interview with ...

I am contacting you because would like to arrange a conversation with ... to inform my research into Co-operative academy schools.

My work explores the recent increase in schools that have affiliated with the Co-operative movement - I am particularly interested in those schools that have adopted a Co-operative 'converter' academy model. This PhD project is funded by Manchester Metropolitan University and is in partnership with the Co-operative College, UK.

I would like to arrange a 45 minute Skype interview. I am currently contacting all Co-operative academies in the hope I will be able to gather a wide range of perspectives on the opportunities and challenges for the Co-operative academy model as it becomes established in the changing sector.

I attach a project outline, by way of introduction to myself and to the work. Please contact me if you have any further questions.

Best wishes,

Joanna Dennis





## Appendix E Project Information Sheet

Project information sheet (Phase 3)

# Joanna Dennis



Education & Social  
Research Institute  
Birley Fields  
53 Bonsall Street  
Manchester  
M15 6GX

### Co-operative Academies: a collective idea in individual times

PhD research at Manchester Metropolitan University



#### What is the project and why does it matter?

This project explores the recent development of Co-operative academy schools in England. Whilst the general rise of academy schools can be readily explained by the 2010 Academies Act, I am interested to investigate the emergence of the Co-operative 'converter' model in particular. I seek to explore the apparent appetite for this model and the ongoing processes that this group of academies undertake in 'becoming Co-operative'.

There is very little academic research into the development of Co-operative academy schools. I hope to contribute to the field by identifying and providing an account of the factors that have created the conditions for the Co-operative 'converter' academy. From there I will explore the possibilities and tensions for the model as it is established in a rapidly changing education system.

#### How will the research be conducted?

This study of Co-operative academies in England will be contextualized by a detailed analysis of contemporary education policy. I will explore the emergence of the Co-operative academy model from multiple perspectives and I am hoping to develop case studies of Co-operative academy practice. This approach will allow me to develop a broad national perspective and also a focused understanding of the opportunities and challenges as the model evolves. I will uphold confidentiality by reporting all findings so as to ensure anonymity and all research will be conducted in accordance with BERA guidelines.

#### About me

I am currently a full-time PhD researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University. My career to date demonstrates a strong commitment to education and a long held interest in the politics of inclusion, participation and social justice.

I graduated in 1996 and worked in the charity sector in various youth and education roles before going into teaching. Initially as a TEFL teacher and then, after a PGCE at Goldsmiths, I became a teacher of English at a large south London community school. In 2013, I secured full funding for the current study, which is in partnership with the Co-operative College, UK.

✉ [joanna.dennis@stu.mmu.ac.uk](mailto:joanna.dennis@stu.mmu.ac.uk)

☎ 07977249736

@JoDennis



## Appendix F Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form



You are invited to take part in a PhD research study, which aims to contribute to current understandings of how co-operative academies operate. Before you decide to participate it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like further information.

### **Who will conduct the study?**

Joanna Dennis, Education and Social Research Institute, Manchester Metropolitan University.

**Title of the study:** Co-operative Academies: a collective idea in individual times

**Key question:** What is a co-operative academy and how does it work co-operatively?

### **What is the aim of the study?**

This study will become part of my main research, which aims to investigate what a co-operative academy is and how it undertakes to work co-operatively. I seek explore the apparent appetite for this model and the ongoing processes that this group of schools undertake in becoming co-operative.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been invited to participate because you can provide evidence on a co-operative academy school or on the wider co-operative landscape. I estimate that will speak to 150 people about the evolution of the co-operative academies including those from the umbrella organisations (the Co-operative Group, Schools Co-operative Society and the Co-operative College). Case study evidence will comprise of: head teacher interviews, governor interviews, senior leader interviews, middle leader interviews, teacher interviews, stakeholder focus groups and lesson observations. There is no risk involved in this type of analysis.

### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

If you participate you will be asked to provide your views on a co-operative academy school and/or the wider landscape. Your views will be gathered in an interview or focus group.

### **What happens to the data collected?**

The evidence you give will be used to develop a picture of what a co-operative academy is. If you consent the information will be used, in a way that protects your identity, to inform understanding of co-operative

academy schools. The data collected will be analysed and become part of a PhD dissertation and journal publications.

**How is confidentiality maintained?**

Any data you provide will be removed of any features that might identify you, where necessary pseudonyms will be used to further protect identity. The interview will be audio-taped and the recording will be deleted as soon as the interview has been transcribed. All files will be kept in an encrypted folder.

**What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

**Will I be paid for participating in the research?**

This research does not pay or reimburse participants.

**What is the duration of my involvement?**

The interview/focus group will last a maximum of one hour.

**Where will the study be conducted?**

The location of the school-based interviews, focus groups and observations will be situated within the schools in rooms negotiated with the members of staff involved. Other interviews will be conducted at locations negotiated with participants.

**Will the outcomes of the study be published?**

The findings of the research may be published in journal articles and conference papers and they will also become part of my PhD thesis.

**Disclosure and Barring Service**

I have a current DBS clearance certificate and will provide this on request.

**Contact for further information:**

I value your participation in this PhD study and I am happy to answer any further questions you may have about it. Email: joanna.dennis@mmu.stu.ac.uk

**What if something goes wrong?**

Please feel free to contact me on the above details, if you feel that something has gone wrong or you are no longer willing to participate.

If you would like to make a formal complaint about the conduct of this study you can contact my supervisor:

Professor John Schostak  
Education and Social Research Institute  
Manchester Metropolitan University  
Manchester M15 6GX  
Email: J.Schostak@mmu.ac.uk

Please sign this form to show you have read and understand the nature of the research outlined above and agree to participate.

Signed ----- Date-----



## CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily
2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to any treatment/service
3. I understand that the interviews will be audio recorded
4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes
5. I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers
6. I agree that any data collected may be used to inform the development of co-operative academy schools

I agree to take part in the above project

Sign:.....

Print name:.....

Date:.....



The diagram illustrates the development of the Co-operative Group's education and training initiatives, showing the relationship between various entities over time.

- Co-operative College, UK**: Education and training organisations in the UK and overseas.
  - Note:* The Co-operative Group commissioned the Co-operative College, UK to undertake various aspects of the Co-operative schools project. Between 2004-2015 this included the development of the Co-op Business & Enterprise Specialist Schools network, the development of the Co-op 'trust' model, the development of Co-op 'converter' academy model.
- The Co-operative Group**: The largest member-owned business in the UK.
  - Note:* The Co-operative Group was a founding member of SCS, was represented on the board, and provided financial and 'in-kind' services to the organisation from 2009-2015.
- The Schools Co-operative Society (SCS)**: A member-owned 'apex' Co-operative, constituted by members in 2009.
  - Note:* As a founding member of SCS, the Co-operative College was represented on the SCS board (by the CEO) until 2016. The College provided clerking services to SCS from 2009-2013. During this research, Adele Gaffin served on the board at both SCS and the Co-operative College.
- Other Key Entities and Transitions:**
  - Co-op Business and Enterprise Specialist Schools** (2004-2010) transitioned into the **Co-op 'trust' schools** (Est. 2008).
  - Co-op 'converter' academies** (Est. 2010) emerged from the trust model.
  - Y/Our 'sponsor' academies** (Est. 2013) emerged from the converter model.
  - The Co-op Academies Trust** (constituted in 2013) emerged from the sponsor model.
  - Co-op 'sponsor' academies** (Est. 2010) emerged from the sponsor model.

Broken lines represent a historical relationship now changed



## Appendix H Co-operative College - Academies Support Package

### Support package from the Co-operative College

The Co-operative College has extensive experience working with school leaders to develop and implement new, co-operative models of governance. We have assisted over 250 schools to implement co-operative Trusts. In partnership with Cobbetts LLP (solicitors) we are now able to offer a full consultancy and project management service for individual and groups of schools who wish to adopt a co-operative model of Academy status.

Through the Schools Co-operative Society we are able to connect you to network of headteachers, senior leaders and staff from co-operative trust schools and academies to share their experiences and expertise. These include a number of high performing schools, NLEs, LLEs, and training specialists.

The service includes advice and support in the following aspects of the conversion process:

#### Consultation process

- advice to ensure consultation is carried out properly
- effectively communicating the changing status to the wider school community

#### Governance and assets

- establishing the co-operative academy trust, including preparing the memorandum and articles of association
- a governance model which has co-operative values at its core and a democratic, multi-stakeholder membership co-operative at its base.
- education law advice on the annexes to the agreement, which cover admissions, SEN and exclusions
- review and completion of the asset transfer agreement
- agreeing transfer of land and buildings currently used by the school to the co-operative academy trust

#### Employment

- the transfer of staff and employment contracts to the co-operative academy trust in accordance with TUPE requirements
- advice on pension implications
- advice and support for communication with staff through the process

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## Appendix I Co-operative College Training Programme

Book online at [www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people/membership](http://www.co-op.ac.uk/schools-and-young-people/membership)  
For more information, contact Steve Kingman: [steve@co-op.ac.uk](mailto:steve@co-op.ac.uk) or 0161 246 2966

### Membership development

This course aims to equip participants with a range of tools and strategies to help them develop membership of their Trust.

By the end of this workshop participants will be able to:

- List the co-operative values and explain how these are put into practice within their co-operative school Trust.
- Identify the reasons why members are important and what role they play in co-operatives.
- Conduct an analysis of their stakeholder profile.
- Start developing a strategy for membership recruitment, engagement, and retention.
- Establish for record keeping and communication systems for membership.

#### Dates and venues:

7/11/12 Manchester

21/11/12 London

16/1/13 Birmingham

15/5/13 Manchester

#### Prices

**Price per delegate: £250**

Book two places and get the second half price.

### Educating young people for employability

This course, designed by Gary Forrest and Sue Barr, will provide you with an understanding of the implications of statutory requirements and government expectations in relation to young people's progression into further learning and employment. It will help you prepare for Ofsted inspection; maximise the outcomes from careers guidance, work-related experiences and employer engagement; and develop an effective strategy to improve your students' employability.

#### Dates and venues:

4/12/12 Manchester

12/3/13 London

20/6/13 Midlands

#### Prices

**Price per delegate: £150**

### Getting started: the first 18 months of a co-operative school

So – your school has completed the legal process of becoming a co-operative Trust school or academy. What next? How do you begin the membership journey? What are you going to do to get your stakeholders involved? Where do co-operative values fit in the classroom? How can you tap in to the wider co-operative school network?

This one-day course will be led by Roger White and will explore the first steps you need to take to establish an effective Trust Board and Forum, and to begin the process of embedding co-operative values into every aspect of your school.

#### Dates and venues:

7/3/13 Manchester

14/5/13 London

#### Prices

**Price per delegate: £250**

Book before 31 December 2012 for a 20% discount

### Vision and values: what does a co-operative school look and feel like?

A major event on this year's calendar, every co-operative school will improve their practice by attending this training conference.

The day will be led by Sarah Jones from Lipson Community College who will provide insights into the transformation of her school through adopting a values-based approach to teaching and learning.

Find out more about the important role of staff development, the development of student leadership and Young Co-operatives, and the way in which classroom practice can be shaped by co-operative values.

Small group workshops will ensure a practical, interactive experience for participants and we guarantee you'll go home buzzing with new ideas!

#### Dates and venues:

1/2/13 Sutherland School, Telford

#### Prices

**Price per delegate: £150**

Book before 31 December 2012 for a 10% discount



## Appendix J Examples of data analysis

Mike Kerrick - the Co-operative College, formerly clerk to SCS

They have not been told. I knew that it was coming but I didn't know what the figure is

~~Mike is critical of SCS~~

I am not surprised.

So yeah. Up to the AGM on the 30th Jan 2013 I was the clerk for SCS - that's a very quick nutshell.

(When was ~~Mike~~ appointed? because it wasn't from the beginning was it?)

He

No. I was one of the founding members because at the time ~~SCS~~ was a High School was one of the founding members as a cooperative trust so ~~SCS~~ was a board member initially. He was then appointed chair to the board of SCS for a period. So then he retired from ~~SCS~~ as a head teacher so in effect ~~SCS~~ still had a place on the board but it wasn't ~~SCS~~. So ~~SCS~~ was approached by the Co-operative Group, to see if he would be interesting in being the Chief Executive on a part time basis so that is how that came about.

(I guess my Q is - so the SCS came into being on that day and schools are invited to become members of that coop)

It's a bit more than that - they are not invited, they are expected to

(has there been 90% take up)

I would say about 95-99% there are a handful who either haven't or who don't want to - I think that school schools have taken the cooperative trust route as an alternative just so they don't have to be academised

(it doesn't actually protect them from that though does it?) resistance & alternative

[00:09:18] No but I think at the start yknow, there was that assertion - if you go down this route then you won't be forced to go down that route. I think some schools didn't understand the difference between the the Co-operative Group, the Co-operative College, SCS and their own cooperative school. But the thing that yknow we keep

the schools thought that they were joining something.

CC Robert Hammond

~~SCS~~ announced additional schools that would be and it included us to develop a

co-operatively with a school in Hull and ~~SCS~~ not ~~SCS~~

interestingly, ~~SCS~~ were on the other pathfinder programme and beat a path to us over a time period.

Me: so where did the genesis of that idea come from? from your work? from that C&F

Yep, it came from two things there was a piece I should have said, towards the latter part of that piece with the Business and Enterprise colleges, and if I remember right that work starts about 2004 and I think that we start with the BEC I would have to get the chronology dead right for you but as their achievement is really

transformational and schools like ~~SCS~~ really rocket and the whole trend is really rocketing it starts getting picked up by Ofsted and we know that Ofsted get really interested in this and I think that that, there is also discussions going

on in the innovation unit of the DFE which by now has been kicked out New Sanctuary it up near Victoria about the the concept of what become chains, the concept of federation, they are pushing hard federations in particular is coming through - so if you like ~~SCS~~ we are being seen without us knowing hang on there is something that interesting happening and I think that there was certainly at that time an acute awareness, well a growing awareness that there was something interesting happening amongst things. And so there was a readiness with what had happened from the C&F Mutuo publication to say, well lets explore this and we had very high level DFE officials sitting in on all of that work, they didn't understand it at all but we worked with

[00:20:53] ~~SCS~~ who is a lawyer to develop the model and ~~SCS~~ just built on other multi-stakeholder models that we had developed for other sectors/word spread

products not designed for education no awareness of the sector

Can they translate expertise?

Mike Kerrick - the Co-operative College, formerly clerk to SCS

~~having to drum into people is it's not the coop its your coop~~ and when people get that I think yknow that helps. In the cooperative converter cooperative academies in their rules it does state that you will become a member of SCS in the earlier rules of the cooperative foundation trusts SCS didn't exist. So it was never written in and I believe that in 2013 that has been included so that from now on all cooperative schools will become members

(but its not a legal requirement - its a heavily suggested idea)

Yes. In line with the values and principles of the movement

(so when a school becomes a member what benefit is there?)

HA!  
Hmm-hmm. Well that's the thing, yeah. We are four years on and its still not clear. Originally SCS was going to be set up to provide services that local authorities were no longer able to provide - from the basics of energy, electricity and gas to HR services, legal services. Then as, yknow, we had a change of government, we had all the funding that the Labour government provided to help schools become cooperative trusts was taken away and the new administration came in and had a very clear vision of the way they wanted to take education so it became more of, SCS became a sort of umbrella organisation a voice for cooperative schools, but then also to protect its own members by if a cooperative school gets itself into trouble following an Ofsted hand has to go into special measures and is threatened with forced academisation then SCS is now a sponsor so they can and they have provide sponsorship to member schools.

(scoop up - but there is not, as far as I know, a school improvement plan in place so if a school does find itself in difficulty the SCS is not going to necessarily take on that role)

No. No. And yknow so its evolved or lurched perhaps is a better word from trying to provide a whole range of services to... the last 12-18 months perhaps have just been focused on becoming a sponsor.

(right OK - I and I guess that's a response to not realising how big things would get)

CC Robert Hammond

and we quickly got interest from a number of other schools but we had no concept of the scale. ~~SCS~~, a publication 'Values make a difference'.

which we then got Ed Balls to launch at the Labour party conference and that stimulated a lot of interest

[00:21:37]

~~SCS~~ describes a fair many political landscape - New Labour - things are changing - the model appeals but Coop College are not clear why excited to be part of it. "had I lost the plot" ~~SCS~~ not sure.

This is an interesting piece cos I think that you will need another conversation with

~~SCS~~ I knew ~~SCS~~ from governance work that he was head of governance services in ~~SCS~~ and I knew him and I asked him to tread this draft of Values Make a Difference - simply because I wanted someone in that mindset of governance to comment - you know, had I lost the plot? And he often quotes back to me, saying ~~SCS~~ you have absolutely no idea how big this is going to be. Because he he could and it's one thing that I would like to explore with him, why he saw this so clearly as something that was filling a gap. Because at that stage

if we had said that we'd got a model that those B&Es would be able to embrace those values and have that transformation long term, we'd have been happy, if we'd have seen 10 or a dozen schools to adopt the model and most people would have thought that was absolutely fantastic

INTERESTING - where did the drive for numbers come from? RH became swept along - influenced PASSIVE CONATUS

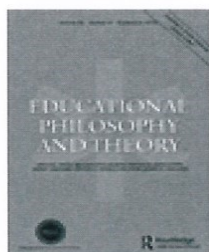
2009

This is the other interesting piece, you know. I then got an invitation to meet the permanent secretary David something - it will come to me, because I met his brother recently. But the Sir Humphrey at New Sanctuary and I went off to this. He was

PLANNING POLITICS

~~SCS~~ disrespecting the process and in awe of it.

## Appendix K Published journal article (Dennis, 2017)



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### Imagining powerful co-operative schools: Theorising dynamic co-operation with Spinoza

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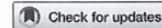


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## Imagining powerful co-operative schools: Theorising dynamic co-operation with Spinoza

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### ABSTRACT

The recent expansion of the English academies programme has initiated a period of significant change within the state education system. As established administration has been disrupted, new providers from business and philanthropy have entered the sector with a range of approaches to transform schools. This paper examines the development of co-operative schools, which are positioned as an 'ethical alternative' within the system and have proved popular with teachers and parents. Using a theory of co-operative power drawn from the philosophy of Spinoza (1632–1677), the author explores how co-operative schools have emerged, with and against the reforming agenda, using narratives of hope and resistance. Spinoza provides theoretical resources to critique this positioning and to project beyond the limiting narratives to an affirmative vision for co-operative schools.

### KEYWORDS

Academies; academisation;  
co-operative schools;  
Spinoza

Spinoza did not believe in hope or even in courage; he believed only in joy and vision. (Deleuze, 1988, p. 14)

In May 2010, a new UK Government entered parliament with a radical plan to transform England's schools. The proposals were ambitious and divisive, envisaging profound change to local governance structures and an increased role for business and philanthropy (DfE, 2010). The key mechanism for these reforms was to be an increase in the number of academy schools, a type of centrally funded 'independent state school' (p. 51) operating outside of local authority control. The ensuing Academies Act (2010) provoked a 'new education landscape' (Gilbert, Husbands, Wigdortz, & Francis, 2013) by expanding the existing academies programme and extending the powers of central government in education. Schools have been incentivised and coerced to adopt academy status (Ball, 2016) and the systemic transformation has been profound (Finn, 2015). In the midst of this disruption, and in response to changing threats and opportunities, the co-operative movement has developed a range of school models that have appealed to teachers and parents. There are currently 600<sup>1</sup> co-operative schools, which are positioned as ethical, values-based alternatives (Facer, Thorpe, & Shaw, 2012) to standard corporate and competitive academy models (Keddie, 2015).

The growth of co-operative schools has been met with enthusiasm from academics who see the transformative potential of co-operative and democratic education (Coates, 2015; Mills, 2015; Woodin, 2011, 2015a, 2015b; Woodin & Fielding, 2013; Woods, 2015). This paper, which reports on a qualitative case-study of the emerging movement, contributes to the literature by attending to the motivations and expectations of those involved. I begin by describing the co-operative schools movement and outlining the policy context that has created the conditions for its growth. Then I explain the connection that I



make between these schools and Spinoza's philosophy, going on to trace the concept of 'co-operative power' that I find the *Ethics*<sup>1</sup>. In the final section, I analyse the emerging movement and identify prevalent narratives of resistance and hope, which Spinoza interprets as 'sad passions'. I argue that such passive articulations serve to undermine co-operative power. I conclude that Spinoza's dynamic theory of co-operation offers an affirmative rationale for co-operative practice.

### Academisation and the growth of co-operative schools

Drawing on a historic and 'symbiotic' relationship with state education (Vernon, 2013, p. 3), the co-operative movement has used recent changes in legislation (Ball, 2007; Exley & Ball, 2014) to enter the sector with a range of co-operative schools.<sup>2</sup> These models claim an 'ethical character', the fundamental basis of which is drawn from globally agreed co-operative values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity (MacPherson, 1995).

The first co-operative trust school opened in 2008 and a small network developed over the next couple of years, with numbers dramatically increasing following the expansion of the academies programme from 2010. Initially, Co-operative College positioned the trust schools as an alternative to academisation and, with changes to legislation, the co-operative convertor academy was developed as an alternative *within* the academies programme. In both cases, academisation was a significant factor in the number of schools that approached the Co-operative College looking for an alternative.

The academies programme is understood as part of a global education reform movement (Ball, 2012), which conceptualises school improvement through the logic of the marketplace and the power of competition (Exley & Ball, 2014). Introduced in 2000, as a radical solution for underperforming secondary schools in urban areas, the first academies were independent of local authority administration and sponsored by business (West & Bailey, 2013). Although this was a high profile policy, with many critics (Ball, 2009; Gorard, 2009), it was relatively small-scale and just 203 academies were operating by 2010.

The expansion of the programme from 2010 has initiated a huge increase in numbers. As of June 2017 the number of academies stands at 6398 (DfE, 2017). The new legislation makes provision for *all* schools to become academies and grants additional powers to the Secretary of State, including the power to recommend that a poor performing school *should* become a sponsored academy. An incentivised 'convertor' model has been introduced, for 'good' and 'outstanding' schools to convert without sponsorship (DfE, 2010). The expanded programme is highly contested (Gunter, 2012) with particular criticism focused upon 'forced academisation' (Ball, 2016), the changing role of the public sector (Simkins, 2015), the creation of a democratic deficit (Hatcher, 2012) and perceived threats to social justice (Lupton, 2011).

Co-operative schools promise to overcome the issues inherent in standard academy models with an ambition to position inclusive, socially just education at the heart of local communities (Facer et al., 2012). As we consider the stated values of co-operative schools, we can begin to see how they represent the kind of education that might be adequate to Spinoza's philosophy. With their explicit claim to the ideals of self-responsibility and self-help, for instance, there is a sense that these schools affirm a strong measure of immanent power; and with their claim to the ideals of democracy, equality, equity and solidarity, they seem well poised to embody the Spinozist idea of the collective individual. It is to the further development of these connections that we now turn.

### Why Spinoza?

The co-operative schools movement is a project of transformation (Shaw, 2015). By positioning itself as ideologically opposed to the dominant logic of competition, and in proposing a co-operative alternative, this group of schools seeks to change current conditions within education. However, it is not immediately clear *why* co-operation is a good idea or *how* the ethics and values work to achieve the ambitions of the movement. I propose that Spinoza offers us resources with which to think through these questions. My research draws on a concept of co-operative power that I find in the *Ethics* and I



argue that it provides an important theoretical framework with which to explore the transformative power of co-operative education.

Spinoza is writing in seventeenth century Amsterdam, during a period of significant economic change, social upheaval and political unrest (Israel, 2001). In turning to Spinoza, we are engaging with a philosopher who thinks beyond the dominant beliefs of his time and seeks to illuminate a different possibility for social and political order. Urging his readers to see that the universe is not as it seems, he argues that there is no transcendental God, that the universe has no teleological purpose and that human individuals are just part of a complex mesh of interrelated matter. These radical revelations have a liberating capacity in Spinoza's project. He wants his readers to understand themselves as social creatures who, capable of reason and subject to emotion, have an immense capacity to form relationships and alliances with others, to create harmonious ways of life. By appealing to both reason and imagination, he offers a persuasive logical argument and a pragmatic analysis of everyday practice. He wants to inspire his readers to recognise their power and to create co-operative ways of living together (James, 2010).

Spinoza offers a distinctive means for theorising the potential of co-operative schools. In the *Ethics*, he presents a philosophical system that places a high value on co-operation, and he develops a novel concept of co-operative power, which is based on relation and interaction between individuals. He observes that when individuals, with a shared interest, combine to seek common goods their power is increased, so that seeking what is good for oneself means seeking what is good for others. The idea of the individual is central to Spinoza's theory of co-operation and he proposes a dynamic, mutable individuality that, through networks of alliance and relation, gives rise to increased collective power. Balibar (1997) calls this *transindividuality*, a reciprocal and relational individuation. For Spinoza, everything in nature is connected, there is no external cause and all parts of nature actively express the immanent power of being (Deleuze, 1990). In such a universe, individualism and collectivity are not opposites, rather the flourishing of the individual is grounded in its connections to, and with, others.

Due to limitations of space, this paper will not provide a complete account of Spinoza's theory of co-operative power. In what follows I outline some useful elements of the theory, using these to illuminate research findings, and signalling how the co-operative schools might better understand themselves always as 'a community to come' (Stolze, 2015, p. 163).

## **Spinoza: Towards a theory of co-operation?**

### ***Spinoza's radical universe—united, immanent and active***

Spinoza's project is concerned with political power (Balibar, 1998). He explores how power is formed, how it ebbs and flows through causal relations, expressing itself in a complex network of active and passive interactions. Ultimately, he seeks to demonstrate how the human power to act is grounded in the dynamism of the universe, and increases through active co-operation with others. However, before he can make these claims, he must cast aside prevailing beliefs about the nature of the universe, of God, of transcendence and causality (Curley, 1988). In the earliest phase of his argument, Spinoza reveals the ontological foundations of his philosophy, '[e]xcept God, no substance can be or be conceived' (EIP14). This is Spinoza's 'radical monism' (Williams, 2007), the claim that all being is one, there is only one being, and that being is God. In a direct challenge to Cartesian dualism, Spinoza argues that there is only one substance, 'God, or Nature' (*Deus sive Natura*). Spinoza's project rests upon this foundation, which places unity rather than dualism at the centre.

Spinoza's next move is to abandon the idea of transcendent power. He writes, 'God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things' (EIP18), denying the transcendental power of God as 'creator' and positioning an immanent power of actualisation, which is both the cause and effect of itself. Through this argument, we witness the 'fall of metaphysical hierarchy' (Sharp & Smith, 2012, p. 1). Transcendence becomes impossible, and power becomes intrinsic (Montag, 1999). Spinoza's doctrine of immanent causality becomes the theory of power in the universe—the active, creative power of cause, and the



corresponding passivity of effect. These ideas of activity and passivity, of cause and effect are the dynamic rhythms of power at work in Spinoza's universe.

### ***Conatus as the striving co-operative power to act***

Spinoza gives an account of how immanent power is expressed through the *conatus*<sup>3</sup> of every being. The *conatus* is the striving (Curley, 1988), which each individual undertakes to increase its power and persist in being. It is the way in which an individual responds and adapts, as cause and effect, through the rhythms of activity and passivity in the universe. This process of self-preservation can be understood as a 'strategy' of action (Bove, 1996), through which an individual *conatus* defends against encounters that might diminish its power, and seeks associations that will augment it. This process hints at the co-operative nature of Spinoza's *conatus*. In order to increase its power of acting the *conatus* engages in multiple relationships, seeking out useful resources with which to mix and mingle, integrate and exchange.

Spinoza tells us that *conatus*, is 'the very essence of man' (EIIIP9S). He explains that this essential striving is a 'will' to persevere; it manifests unconsciously as 'appetite' and consciously as 'desire' (EIIIP9S). As the unconscious appetites and conscious desires flow through the *conatus* it becomes a site of both imagination and reason. This link between imagination and reason is a significant move in Spinoza's ethical project, by understanding the self-preservation of the *conatus* as a rational endeavour it becomes a virtuous process (Lloyd, 1996). Spinoza understands reason and virtue as the same thing and writes,

it is clear that we neither strive for nor will, neither want, nor desire because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it. (EIIIP9S)

The striving to persevere is the vital thing and, at once, it becomes both the reason and the purpose. The good in itself. Spinoza writes, 'the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being, and [that] happiness consists in a man's being able to preserve his being' (EIVP18S). Thus, there is no conflict between self-seeking and altruism because self-preservation is the good in itself, the foundation of virtue, and the way to harmonious living (Lloyd, 1996). In a clear depiction of *conatus* as a co-operative power Spinoza explains how we must look 'outside ourselves to preserve our being' (EIVP18S). He describes how, in joining with others, we increase our power to act:

[For] if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more powerful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being; and that all, together, should seek for themselves the common advantage of all. (EIVP18S)

Whilst the *conatus* is 'individual self-maintenance' (Hampshire, 1951, p. 78) it is also the way in which the particular participates in the universal, so that 'by preserving oneself one contributes to the preservation of the entire universe of which we are all an infinitesimal part' (Mack, 2010, p. 8).

### ***Mind as the idea of the body—the role of affect and imagination***

In order to propel itself through life, the *conatus* draws upon and maximises all available resources, including those of body and mind. Spinoza attends to the way in which the power of the *conatus* flows through body and mind as both passion and emotion, imagination and reason. For Spinoza, mind and body are not separate substances, nor is the body and its passionate affects inferior to the mind and its rational processes. On the contrary, Spinoza contends that the mind and body are intrinsically related expressions of the same human individual, he explains that 'the idea of any thing that increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our body's power of acting, increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our mind's power of thinking' (EIIIP11). To give a full account of the dynamic power of the *conatus*, Spinoza's analysis explores the way in which reason and imagination come together in the human body and mind as active and passive forces.



Spinoza tells us that the imagination is a passive realm in which individuals are occupied by inadequate ideas and subject to multiple affects, and that the rational mind is an active realm in which individuals are in possession of adequate knowledge and have freedom from the passions (Balibar, 1997). The point is not to give primacy to either one of these realms but to understand the continual play of activity and passivity that persists within every moment. As the striving *conatus* negotiates this terrain, both within itself and along with others, it encounters a range of ideas and affects that serve to increase and diminish its power to act. This theory offers an analysis of human affects and an explanation of how these work to empower and disempower the striving *conatus*. Spinoza observes that as the *conatus* engages in multiple affective encounters, such as love and hate or hope and fear it operates with greater and lesser consciousness, and increases or diminishes its capacity for joy and sadness. For Spinoza, joy is the 'passage from a lesser to a greater perfection' (EIIIDefAff) and sadness is its opposite. As our conscious power of acting is increased we experience greater joy, as our conscious power of acting is decreased we experience greater sadness.

Thus there is a connection between the striving power of the *conatus* and the passions, which directly relate to the conative power to act. As we consider the emerging power of the co-operative academy, it is pertinent to attend to the affective passage of the school as it assumes its new status. It is with an idea of the *conatus* of the transforming school<sup>4</sup> that I now track the accounts of this process of change by those directly involved.

### **An affective analysis of school conversion to co-operative status**

This study examines the emergence of the co-operative 'convertor' academy. These are 'good' or 'outstanding' schools, which have academised and assumed a co-operative status. Qualitative research was conducted between 2014–2016 and sites of fieldwork included the Co-operative College and four co-operative academy schools. Research was undertaken at a time of upheaval, following a notable growth period and when these schools were in the earliest phase of their new identity.

This section focuses upon the motivation of schools to adopt co-operative status, identifying three significant perceptions, which emerged as motivating factors during the research. Firstly, that the co-operative ethos represented a hopeful possibility, secondly that it would involve minimal change to existing ethos, and thirdly that it served to ameliorate concerns about academisation. Most participants suggested that the decision had been informed by a combination of these factors, which I have interpreted as manifestations of resistance and hope, sparked by the contentious education reforms and positioned as galvanising narratives within the co-operative schools movement. Spinoza's concept of co-operative power allows us to critically examine these positions and to trace the emerging co-operative academy as it strives to persist and increase its power to act.

Research began at the Co-operative College in 2014, where I spoke to those who had played a significant role in developing the co-operative schools. The previous years had been busy and the atmosphere at the College was buoyant. The CEO spoke with delight at way in which the education sector had been inspired by co-operation. He believed that the co-operative schools movement had returned a sense of hope, offering itself as a form of resistance and alternative to a fully privatised system. It was evident that the growth of the movement was a response to academisation. Reflecting on this, the CEO made a link to the political context and the ideological drive of academisation,

First of all, is the context of this, which has been the lifetime of the [Coalition] administration and is just coming to an end. An overwhelming political desire to break up the old system, with all the eggs in the single basket of academisation. (CEO, Co-operative College, 2015)

He acknowledged the systemic change and reflected upon how this had motivated some schools,

The status quo is not an option. That change is there. Certainly, there is an element of 'the least worst option' for some, as oppose to a positive choice of wanting to do things. (CEO, Co-operative College, 2015)

In recognising that some schools had undertaken a passive course of 'the least worst option' rather than make a 'positive choice' of co-operative action he reveals a significant weakness in co-operative



motivation. The CEO did not directly address this question, however other members of the team expressed unease about the process,

Conversions happened without ever really establishing the school's motivation for becoming a co-operative school – what were they doing it for? Were they doing it to become a co-operative school, or for some other reason? (Staff member, Co-operative College)

Evidence suggests that motivation was not adequately addressed as schools converted. A staff member told me that the strategy had been, 'sign them up, get them converted and then grow co-operation in the months and years that followed'. I argue that this lack of concern for motivation, combined with an absence of strategy, is likely to have had a deleterious effect on co-operative power. As Spinoza demonstrates, an ethic of co-operation emerges when the collective individual has an active relationship towards the mutable universe. The immanent power of being situates causality in the world of our own actions. Schools must actively engage with their transformation in order to increase their power of acting. Furthermore, whilst it is possible to understand the spirit of optimism that drove the course the growth, it is disappointing to note that there was no strategy and limited resources to undertake post-conversion work. This was presented as a strength of the movement, suggesting that since there was 'no blueprint' schools were empowered to define their co-operative nature. In practice this meant that schools, which had not fully interrogated their reasons for conversion, were then invited to interpret their new status on their own, with varying degrees of success, ironically affirming the kind of individualism that runs counter to the stated co-operative ideals. That the process of 'becoming co-operative' should be left entirely to the schools themselves calls into question the idea that co-operation is indeed co-operative and, I argue that the lack of strategy also positions 'hope' as the main force of change.

As the field of study expanded to include the schools, I began to get a picture of the upheaval that the sector had endured. There was a sense in which the schools felt that they had been 'striving' for their survival and attitudes towards the academies programme were described in affective terms. One head teacher recounted her 'dismay', another described parents as 'up in arms', and another explained that governors were 'highly resistant'. As research progressed, it became apparent that the co-operative academy had been seen as a way of resisting or diverting elements of the unpopular agenda.

There were those who saw the co-operative academy as a way of retaining the character of their school. These leaders felt that the co-operative values were a close approximation of their existing school ethos so that the co-operative academy seemed to offer minimum change. The CEO suggested that these schools were 'changing to stay the same', and my analysis points to a potential compromise of co-operative power. The following quotation from a parent governor describes how the co-operative academy was presented,

To all intents and purposes I don't think that most people would have a clue that there has been any change at all ... it was a way forward that meant that they could be an academy but still be how they were ... The message was that we won't be the same as the other group academies that you have heard about, we are not going to become a business, we are going to carry on doing the right thing and being a co-operative was a way of doing that. (Parent Governor, Raines Chase Community College)

The message that the school was going 'carry on doing the right thing' that they would 'be an academy but still be how they were' suggests that this school sought to preserve itself by adopting the co-operative model. Using Spinoza's concept of the *conatus*, we can see how this is a form 'static self-preservation' (Matheron via Duffy, 2010). The *conatus* is not simply a preservation of one's current capacities but also always entails a dynamic relationship to the future and a determination to increase one's power to act through collective relations. Therefore a static approach is likely to weaken the power to act. A dynamic co-operative academy would always act for transformation not preservation, and would be less concerned with assuming a 'co-operative identity' than with pursuing co-operative power to act.

Some school leaders saw the co-operative model as a way of overcoming resistance to academisation. They felt that the co-operative model served to ameliorate the concerns of those strongly opposed to academisation. One leader explained this,

It appealed to a group of my governors who, ideologically, are opposed to what this government is doing to education. By that I mean diversifying and quasi-privatising it, separating schools from each other and from the Local Authority.



So they are fundamentally, ideologically opposed to that and felt that the co-op with its roots in local democracy offered a strong alternative – an alternative based in the values that they believed in. (Principal, Woodby School)

This school leader felt that the co-operative model ‘softened the blow’ of academisation by allowing these schools to make transition with the support of all stakeholders. One leader described the co-operative model as, ‘a compromise to get the school into that new place’. There was an attitude of fear towards academisation and the co-operative model was interpreted as a hopeful alternative. Spinoza’s idea of sad passions reveals how this positioning compromises the *conatus*. Spinoza suggests that ‘hope is an inconstant joy’ (EIIIDefAff), which arises from an idea of a future or past thing the outcome of which is in doubt and that ‘fear is an inconstant sadness’ (EIIIDefAff), which arises from an idea of a future or past thing the outcome of which is in doubt. So using this analysis both hope and resistance become non-affirmative states. In contrast, Spinoza tells us that ‘confidence is a joy born of the idea of a future or past thing concerning which the cause of doubting has been removed’ (EIIIDefAff). Thus, hope and resistance are non-affirmative states, while confidence and a strategy of action to augment power are the means of affirmation. This analysis shows how sad passions are entailed in the reasoning about school conversion with a diminishing effect on the *conatus*. Whilst the co-operative academy is positioned as a hopeful alternative it is always already a diminishing possibility and a cause of sadness, the hopeful are called to imagine a future where their ideal school is possible but the very nature of hope means that they are always in doubt, fearing that its impossibility will be the certain outcome.

I suggest that the absence of a strategy for the growth and development of the co-operative academy schools has diminished their power to act, and reduced their future-oriented state of confidence. Beyond the stated ideals of cooperation, there is no consideration given to how schools might become co-operative and what it would mean for them to be so. A set of ideals is static, but a set of practices is dynamic and responsive. When the Co-operative College say that ‘there is no blueprint’, they fail to see how their idealism is standing in, and thus displacing, the complex relational dimension of ethical practice. I argue that the lack of concern about school motivation, insufficient resources and an absence of strategy for the co-operative schools movement amounts to a lack confidence in the possibility, surfacing as doubt and consigning it always to a position of hope and fortune.

The co-operative academy school was sparked from a moment of opportunity seized by the co-operative movement and embraced by professionals and parents who have faith in the co-operative values and fear their opposite. Fear and faith are insufficiently affirmative affects upon which to build a school. Narratives of hope and resistance have served to compromise the idea of the co-operative academy school and, if it is to fulfil its promise, it must redefine itself according to stronger narratives of confidence and power.

## Conclusion

My research reveals that in the expansion of the co-operative schools movement there has been an insufficient emphasis on the development of co-operative ethos and practice. Whilst this is somewhat inevitable during periods of change it is now important for these schools to attend to their co-operative power. The co-operative academy tends to understand itself in terms of what it is not—it is not competitive, or not corporate, or not predatory. Despite a convincing vision the data point to a mixture of complex affects around the application of the co-operative values within the academy school, including disappointment, confusion, denial, fear and hope.

Spinoza’s co-operation is active and mutable—there are many possibilities for the co-operative individual to pursue, always involving change and adaptation. There is no possibility of ‘staying the same’. For Spinoza the process of co-operation is continual—it cannot be a status that you achieve nor a set of rules that you live by. It follows, therefore, that ‘co-operative ethics and values’ cannot be handed down from the past—for co-operation to be powerful it must be actively and continually constituted. Co-operation cannot be reduced to an ‘ethical alternative’ and the co-operative academy cannot be the ‘acceptable face’ of academisation—such positions of resistance and hope deprive it of its power to act. A successful co-operative *conatus* cannot be passive, static, resistant, hopeful or fearful—these are sad passions.



Spinoza gives us an account of co-operative power that reveals the potential of the co-operative academy school to take a stance of 'dynamic co-operation', which repositions the public as active stakeholders, prioritises inclusion and embraces co-operation as an affirmative operating philosophy. Of course, this has always been the vision, however the research shows a mixed picture in which cooperation is largely constrained by passive affects and static ideals. The dominance of passive passages—towards hope or resistance—mark the schools as diminished bodies with diminished power, and the appeal to static idealism runs contrary to Spinoza's responsive ethics. In order to enhance their power, and better animate the co-operative intentions, I argue for a more dynamic understanding of co-operation. Thinking with Spinoza, my proposal is for a co-operative school that invests in the process of 'dynamic co-operation' so as to equip itself with the power to respond to the challenges of the contemporary moment.

## Notes

1. Conventional abbreviated citation is used when referring to Spinoza's Ethics (e.g. EIP852 refers to Ethics, Part I Proposition 8, Scholium 2). Citations for the Ethics are quoted from Spinoza, B. (1996) Ethics, Edwin, M. Curley (trans.), London: Penguin 1996.
2. Figures provided by the Co-operative College, UK in April 2017.
3. There are three co-operative models, which were developed with investment from the Co-operative Group, UK and the Co-operative College, UK. These are: co-operative 'trust' schools, co-operative 'sponsored' academies and co-operative 'convertor' academies (for a full account see Woodin, 2015b).
4. Initially coined by the Stoics (Wolfson, 1934 via Lloyd), and present in the work of Spinoza's contemporaries Descartes, Hobbes (Curley, 1988) and Leibniz (Deleuze, 1990).
5. In the analysis that follows I position the co-operative academy school as an individual in the ontological sense. That is, as a complex 'body politic' (Balibar, 1998, p. 64) an 'individual of individuals' (p. 64). Balibar's interpretation of Spinoza's theory of individuation is discussed by Gatens and Lloyd (1999, chapter 5). For an argument that runs counter to this see Rice (1990).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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